

REMOTE WARFARE AND THE BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY

Scott Hickie, Chris Abbott and Matthew Clarke



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This report has been commissioned by the **Remote Warfare Programme** of the **Oxford Research Group**. The programme examines changes in military engagement, with a focus on remote warfare. This form of intervention takes place behind the scenes or at a distance rather than on a traditional battlefield, often through drone strikes and air strikes from above, with special forces, intelligence operatives, private contractors, and military training teams on the ground.

Chris Abbott is the founder and executive director of Open Briefing. Chris was previously the deputy director of the Oxford Research Group. He has been an honorary visiting research fellow in the Centre for Governance and International Affairs at the University of Bristol and in the School of Social and International Studies at the University of Bradford. Chris is the author of two popular books and numerous influential reports and articles on security, politics and history.

Matthew Clarke is a researcher at Open Briefing. Following a master's degree from the University of Birmingham, with a dissertation on the development of counter-insurgency strategies in Iraq, Matthew has worked in business, politics and the European NGO community. He is currently a freelance data scientist, working on the development of artificial intelligence and new data management technologies.

Scott Hickie is a senior analyst at Open Briefing. He is a lawyer, urban planner and former political adviser with a background in environmental law, natural resource governance and climate change. He has also worked in the Australian NGO sector on international trade and corporate social responsibility and in the government sector on energy security and climate change adaptation. His research focus is on urban conflict and natural resource management.

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The Remote Warfare Programme
Oxford Research Group
Development House
56-64 Leonard Street
London EC2A 4LT
United Kingdom

+44 (0)207 549 0298
info@remotecontrolproject.org
<http://remotecontrolproject.org>

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1. Introduction

The United States has been using special operations forces, covert agents, mercenaries and proxy armies to fight wars out of the public eye since the Cold War. By the time of the 'war on terror', these unconventional forces were being used alongside regular coalition military units in counter-insurgency (COIN) operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

However, the recent and rapid development of new technologies and capabilities, as well as a lack of political appetite for large-scale military interventions, has led Western governments to embrace a 'remote warfare' strategy in today's multiple and dispersed operations against jihadist networks. The recent shift away from 'boots on the ground' deployments towards light-footprint Western military interventions means Western forces often now work with and through local and regional forces, who undertake the bulk of the frontline fighting.

With the rise of Boko Haram, international support to Nigeria and its neighbours has increased, with the US, the UK, France, Russia and China providing training, equipment, intelligence and military aid.¹ The evolution of the Boko Haram insurgency over 2017 presents an opportunity for reflection and evaluation. Analysis for this report shows that while the operations carried out by the Nigerian military, alongside its regional and international partners, have degraded Boko Haram, they have also encouraged the factional forces to metastasise, build resilience and craft new tactics to sustain ongoing political violence.

These developments raise important wider questions:

- What happens when territory is reclaimed from insurgencies through high-tempo counter-terrorism operations and remote warfare yet militants retain the capacity to exploit human insecurity and destabilise efforts at normalisation?
- Does remote warfare provide sufficient flexibility to span broader timelines and the different stages of a conflict?

The answers have significance outside Nigeria, as ISIS has now entered a similar stage in the wake of the destruction of its 'caliphate' in Iraq and Syria.

While Boko Haram's focus remains on the three strategic attack nodes of Maiduguri, Lake Chad and the Borno (Nigeria)/Extreme Nord (Cameroon) border, it has increased its attacks on civilians relative to attacks on military and law enforcement targets. It has also increasingly relied on suicide attacks, including using children as bombers. The same mix of conventional military operations and remote warfare that Nigeria and its partners used to reclaim territory and prevent larger-scale swarm attacks may not now achieve the same successes in this new conflict dynamic.

Open Briefing and the Remote Warfare Programme have been closely monitoring these developments over 2017. Open Briefing has produced five intelligence briefings since April summarising and analysing the main international developments, the actions of US and European partners, the actions of local governments and coalitions, and the various Boko Haram attacks over the previous month. We have tracked Boko Haram's shift from high-profile attacks on government forces and infrastructure to high-frequency attacks on soft targets, such as camps for internally displaced people (IDPs). We have also noted the need for the forces arrayed against Boko Haram to evolve their tactics away from bombing raids and ground clearance operations, as this approach is unlikely to counter the new Boko Haram threat.

Nigeria's government currently appears to be in a tactical halfway house. It is expending significant effort on killing or capturing Boko Haram's leaders. This is often through air strikes by armed manned and unmanned aerial platforms followed up by ground forces raids, sometimes with special operations forces (SOF) support. These operations are designed to restore confidence in the government's ability to protect its citizens, but when the leaders remain at large it undermines that confidence. At the same time, it is deploying the newly-developed special mobile strike forces from military and law enforcement agencies in order to

try and counter Boko Haram's attacks on soft targets.² However, the ability of mobile teams to reduce these attacks and deny Boko Haram access to their strategic attack nodes is uncertain. While local and regional defence and security actors have the tactical upper hand in the conflict, the potential need for further external support cannot be ruled out.

Any US, European or Russian military participation in or support for Nigeria's mobile strike forces carries reputational and operational risks. Limited air platforms to move troops, a higher likelihood of civilian casualties and friendly fire incidents and the potential for human rights abuses are all risks for external foreign forces. Foreign involvement becomes riskier where counter-terrorism (CT) operations are shared across multiple Nigerian agencies and are reactively shaped by opportunistic Boko Haram attacks. The geopolitical objectives of foreign powers may not sufficiently justify such risks. For some foreign powers, containing Boko Haram within north-eastern Nigeria may be enough to meet their national security interests.

2. The evolution of Boko Haram

In 2002, Muslim cleric Mohammed Yusuf created a school and mosque in northern Nigeria that was the beginnings of Boko Haram.³ Yusuf had been using the infrastructure of other peaceful religious groups to teach Boko Haram's philosophy for the previous two years. He was a proponent of sharia law, and desired the creation of an Islamic state in Nigeria.⁴ Boko Haram loosely translates from Hausa to 'Western education is forbidden', though the group's formal name of Jama'atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad (JAS), meaning 'People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad', probably more accurately reflects its original motivations. Shortly after Yusuf founded his school in 2002, the leader of al-Qaeda, Osama Bin Laden, distributed \$3 million among the Salafi-jihadi groups in northern Nigeria – much of which is thought to have gone to Boko Haram.⁵

Later that year, Yusuf's second-in-command, Abubakar Shekau, and a splinter group of approximately 200 men formed a separate community in the border region between Nigeria and Cameroon. The group was based on strict religious rules, and became known as the Nigerian Taliban.⁶ However, a fishing rights dispute with the local community ultimately led to an armed standoff with police in December 2003, resulting in the deaths of most of the members of the Nigerian Taliban. In early 2004, Shekau and the surviving members of his group returned to Yusuf and Boko Haram.⁷

Yusuf was arrested in 2008 on terrorism charges, but later released on bail.⁸ A confrontation between Boko Haram and Nigerian security forces in Maiduguri led to the July 2009 Boko Haram uprising, during which 1,500 people were killed.⁹ On 28 July, the Nigerian military captured Yusuf and transferred him to police custody, where he is thought to have been summarily executed.¹⁰

After the uprising and Yusuf's death, the Nigerian government banned Boko Haram and demolished its mosques. The group went underground, and there was a year-

long lull in the violence. However, Boko Haram re-emerged with Shekau as its leader in mid-2010. The group targeted churches, government compounds and security forces in a wave of violence over the next year.¹¹ Under Shekau's leadership, Boko Haram launched a military campaign to build an Islamic state in Nigeria. It is at this point that Boko Haram became an active insurgency, with the group using asymmetric warfare, the taking and controlling of territory, raids on law enforcement and military facilities and infrastructure, and attacks on neighbouring countries to further their goal of creating a caliphate.

In June 2011, Boko Haram carried out a suicide bombing attack against Nigeria's police headquarters – the first such attack in the country's history.¹² Then, in August 2011, a Boko Haram suicide bomber drove a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) through two security barriers and into the lobby of the UN offices in the Nigerian capital, Abuja, killing at least 21 people.¹³ This was the first time the group had attacked a foreign target. The method of attack suggests that al-Qaeda helped Boko Haram to carry out the attack.

Shekau pledged allegiance to ISIS in March 2015, and Boko Haram began using the name Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in its propaganda videos. In June 2016, reports emerged that Boko Haram appeared to have split, with half of the fighters leaving Shekau after a dispute with ISIS over Shekau's continued attacks on mosques and his use of child suicide bombers. In August 2016, ISIS announced that Abu Musab al-Barnawi, thought to be Yusuf's son, was the new leader of Boko Haram. Between 2013 and 2015, Barnawi had been working with Ansaru (formally known as al-Qaeda in the Lands Beyond the Sahel), a group that had split from Boko Haram because of a disagreement over the killing of civilian Muslims.¹⁴ Two days after ISIS's announcement that Barnawi was now leading ISWAP, Shekau released a video in which he claimed that he was still the leader of the group and alleged that there had been an attempted coup.¹⁵

Shekau appears to be the operational leader of the main bulk of the group today, which has reverted to using the original JAS (Boko

Haram) moniker and is largely operating to the south of Maiduguri in the Sambisa Forest in Nigeria. Barnawi is thought to be in control of the breakaway ISWAP group, which operates largely in northern Borno, around Lake Chad and the region that crosses Yobe State in Nigeria and southern Diffa Region in Niger.¹⁶ However, media organisations and NGOs continue to use Boko Haram to refer to Shekau's group and the various factions and breakaway groups, and we have followed suit in this report.

Boko Haram is motivated by a Salafist-jihadi ideology, and seeks to create an Islamic state. The group follows the doctrine of *takfir*, whereby a Muslim can excommunicate and kill a fellow Muslim should they deem them to be a non-believer.¹⁷ Shekau has used *takfir* to punish commanders who question his leadership and to justify the killing of members of rival groups. This is the main point of contention between Boko Haram and both ISIS and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).¹⁸

Boko Haram uses religious preaching as a recruitment tool, though a significant proportion of its fighters have apparently joined the group for criminal purposes rather than religious motivations.¹⁹ Indeed, Boko Haram gets its funding primarily from criminal activities, including bank robberies and kidnapping. This includes suspected multi-million-dollar ransom pay-outs by French negotiators.²⁰ Previously, a small portion of its funding came from AQIM, but this has reduced significantly since the group pledged allegiance to ISIS. Following the leadership dispute between Shekau and Barnawi, other sources of funding from extremist groups, such as al-Shabaab, have also dried up. With limited funds, the group must use stolen or low-cost weaponry.²¹ It also trains children as young as five or six years old to act as suicide bombers, and has been known to use abducted women as bombers as well.²²

On 25 March 2017, Nigeria's domestic intelligence agency, the Department of State Services (DSS), disrupted plans by six suspected Boko Haram militants to attack the British and US embassies in Abuja. Then on 5 May, the UK foreign office in London and the US embassy in Abuja both reported that they had credible intelligence to suggest

that Boko Haram was planning to increase its kidnapping of foreign workers in the Bama local government area of Borno State.²³

In August 2017, Barnawi released a video on YouTube in which he agreed to help the Nigerian government defeat Shekau's Boko Haram. Barnawi claimed that he is ready to negotiate a peace deal with the government, but that Shekau has been a major obstacle to peace since 2009. Former Boko Haram commander Abdulkadir Abubakar said that Shekau's faction was indiscriminate in its killings while Barnawi only targeted security forces.²⁴ Barnawi's overtures of peace came after Nigeria's chief of army staff, Lieutenant General Tukur Buratai, gave orders for Shekau to be captured or killed within 40 days.²⁵ Despite multiple reports of his death, Shekau remains at large at the time of writing.

3. Defence and security actors

a. Nigerian forces

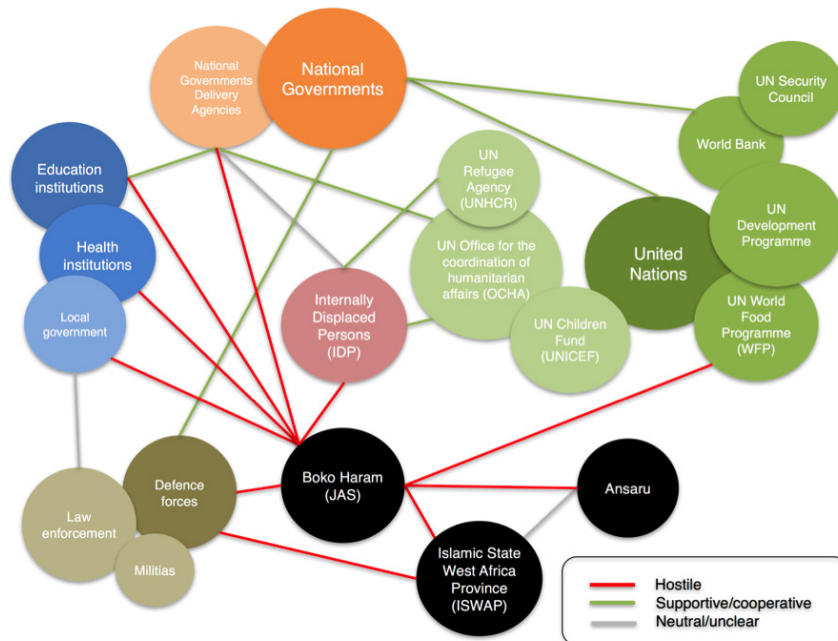


Figure 1. Actor map showing the relevant players in Nigeria and the relationships between them.

Boko Haram came to wider international attention on 14 April 2014 when a group of Boko Haram fighters broke into the Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok in Borno State and kidnapped 276 pupils aged 16-18. The #BringBackOurGirls social media campaign went viral and kept the girls plight in the public’s mind for a considerable length of time. This in turn translated into limited military and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) support from the US and some European partners and intelligence-sharing support from China.²⁶

Prior to 2010, and before the insurgency entered a more virulent stage, the Nigerian government primarily relied on coordinated law enforcement actions to contain Boko Haram. As Boko Haram’s attacks escalated in scope and magnitude in 2011, Abuja mobilised its armed forces against Boko Haram, including the Nigerian Army and Nigerian Air Force (NAF). The government also created a Special Military Joint Task Force (SMJTF), which consisted of personnel from the Nigeria Police Force

(NPF), the Department of State Security (DSS), the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) and the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA).²⁷

The escalation of attacks and the bombing of the UN headquarters in Abuja in 2011 forced the Nigerian government and armed forces to develop tactics for confronting Boko Haram, especially between the 2013 state of emergency and the December 2015 deadline for defeating Boko Haram – set by the new Nigerian president, Muhammadu Buhari, upon taking office in May 2015.²⁸ Controversially, this included employing South African mercenaries from STTEP International to train Nigerian counterterrorism forces and support irregular or asymmetric warfare against Boko Haram using the militant group’s own hit-and-run tactics.²⁹

In July 2015, the Nigerian Army renamed its efforts against Boko Haram from Operation Zaman Lafiya, which had been used since August 2013, to Operation Lafiya Dole, which means ‘peace by all means’ or ‘peace by force’. This signalled the escalation of the

war against the militant group in line with the government's self-imposed deadline for its defeat.³⁰ In December 2015, the Nigerian government claimed it had succeeded in meeting its deadline to defeat Boko Haram; however, the militant group has displayed a degree of resilience and an ability to adapt its tactics.

Since June 2016, the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) has increased the tempo of its airstrikes against Boko Haram through Operation Gama Aiki.³¹ The NAF has been tactically crucial in the fight against Boko Haram. A large portion of NAF's forces have been deployed in north-eastern Nigeria to support ground operations and target the Boko Haram leadership.³² The air force has relied on 'dumb' weaponry, such as unguided bombs, but has used unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to good effect, though predominately for reconnaissance missions rather than air strikes.³³ In February 2016, however, the NAF released video footage confirming a successful air strike near Sambisa Forest from a Chinese-made CH-3 armed drone.³⁴

There have been numerous reports of Boko Haram fighters handing themselves in to the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC).³⁵ The NSCDC is a paramilitary unit created in 1967 and amended in 2007 that supports police operations and hunts Boko Haram militants. In addition, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) provides support to the Nigerian military and police, with the largest unit based in Maiduguri in Borno State.³⁶ The Nigerian government established the CJTF in 2013 shortly after it declared states of emergency in Yobe, Adamawa and Borno states in the northeast of the country.³⁷ The CJTF is predominately made up of vigilante groups, hunters, farmers and youths in the areas most affected by Boko Haram. Various local hunting associations have also been targeting Boko Haram fighters in Sambisa Forest, with some hunters employed on an ad hoc basis by the army or local government. However, CJTF involvement in the war economy has given rise to concerns over the government use of vigilante groups.³⁸

b. Regional partners

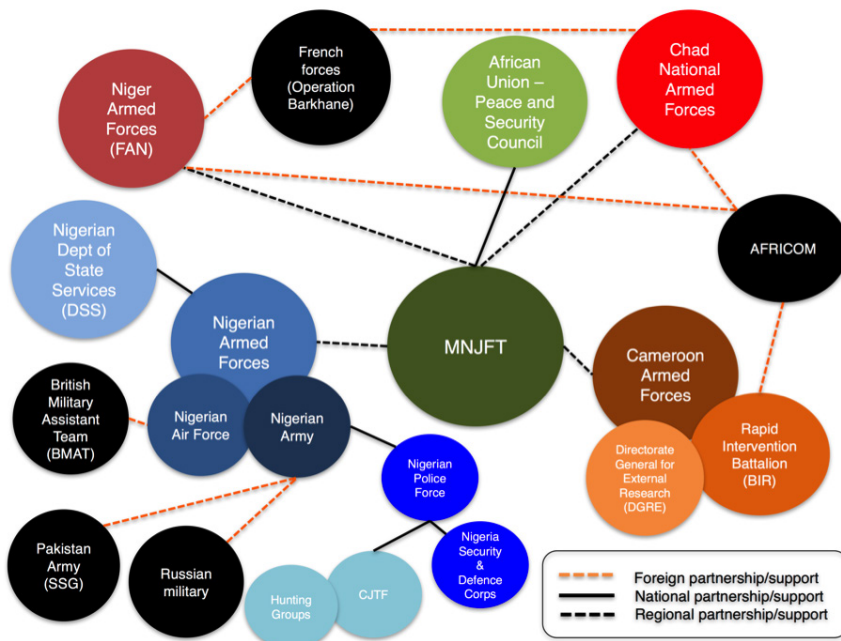


Figure 2. Actor map of the forces arrayed against Boko Haram and the relationships between them.

Many of Nigeria's neighbours have declared local state of emergencies following areas in the region being attacked by Boko Haram, and have deployed their militaries to re-establish control over those areas.³⁹ Cameroon's military has been the most active in confronting Boko Haram within its borders.⁴⁰ Boko Haram has been present in Cameroon since at least 2011, with the first attacks in the country taking place in March 2014. Cameroonian special forces have conducted a number of targeted CT campaigns, often under the banner of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), including various iterations of operations Alpha, Arrow, Emergence and Thunder.⁴¹

Chad increased its military response to Boko Haram during the major escalation of violence in the country in 2015, which was partly in response to Chad's intervention against Boko Haram in neighbouring countries. As with its neighbours, Chad's response to Boko Haram has been primarily military rather than law enforcement.⁴² Communities around Lake Chad, in particular, have been caught in the crossfire between state forces and the militant group.

Information on Niger's military efforts is scarce. Boko Haram has been contained to Niger's south-eastern Diffa region, which borders Borno State in Nigeria. Intercommunal tensions have been stoked in the area by both the militants and government COIN operations. What information is available suggests that Niger's posture against Boko Haram is a defensive one rather than counter-terrorist. This may be due to the priority given to joint Nigerian, French and US operations against AQIM closer to the Niger-Mali border. Indeed, Niger remains both a strategic bridge for violent jihadist groups transiting between North and sub-Saharan Africa and a key staging ground for US special operation forces and the G5 Sahel partners.

In general, national and regional operations against Boko Haram are undertaken under the umbrella of the MNJTF. The Lake Chad Basin Commission originally established the task force in 1998 to confront cross-boundary criminal activity; however, it was activated as counter-terrorist force in 2014, and its deployment against Boko Haram was authorised on 29 January 2015.⁴³ Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria

contribute the estimated 10,000 personnel that make up the task force; however, the level of force integration is limited to non-existent, and each country maintains considerable autonomy in its actions against Boko Haram.⁴⁴

The MNJTF is headquartered in N'Djamena in Chad, and there are MNJTF sector headquarters in Mora in Cameroon, Diffa in Niger, Baga-Sola in Chad and Baga in Nigeria.⁴⁵ In early 2015, Boko Haram attacked and temporarily took over a MNJTF base in Baga in Borno State. The attack became an inflection point for the MNJTF and Nigeria's neighbours. Since then, Boko Haram is clearly seen to be threatening key trade and logistics routes and disrupting

economic interests in the region. The new military offensive by the armies involved in the MNJTF has been called Operation Rawan Kada (or Operation Gama Aiki II by the Nigerians) since June 2016.⁴⁶

Defence officials from the MNJTF countries met in Yaoundé, Cameroon, from 3 to 6 July 2017 to discuss the progress made against Boko Haram and resourcing the task force.⁴⁷ Defence ministers from Cameroon, Nigeria, Chad, Niger and Benin noted that major military campaigns had splintered Boko Haram into smaller groups thereby disaggregating the MNJTF's resources. They also warned that the militaries of the MNJTF lack sufficient resources for wages.

c. International partners

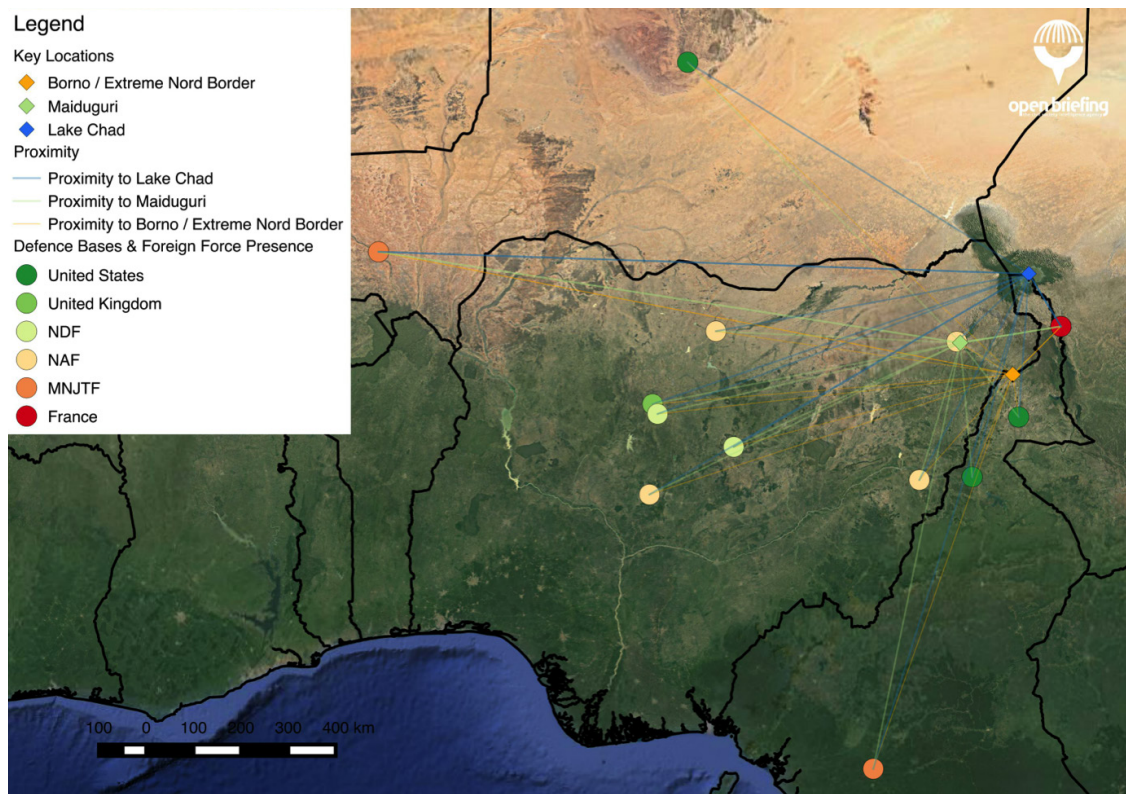


Figure 3. Key military assets and their proximity to Boko Haram conflict events.

i. United States

The US State Department had placed Boko Haram on its Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO) list in November 2013. Its designation as a FTO brought sanctions against the group, led to members of the group being barred from the US and made it a criminal offence in the US for any person or organisation to provide material support to the group. However, the FTO designation angered the Nigerian government. The then Nigerian ambassador to the United States, Adebowale Adefuye, said that the well-intentioned move would ‘risk deepening and entrenching the Boko Haram movement, thereby endangering more lives’.⁴⁸ The White House further angered Abuja in November 2014 when it refused the sale of weapons to Nigeria over fears that they would be used against the civilian population rather than Boko Haram. The US Leahy laws dictate that the sale of lethal weapons is forbidden to countries whose militaries have been accused of gross human rights abuses.

In 2015, the US government deployed between 200 and 300 SOF personnel to Cameroon for ISR advise and assist missions.⁴⁹ Reports suggest that some are based in Salak in northern Cameroon and work closely with Cameroon’s elite Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR).⁵⁰ Amnesty International accuses the BIR of torture and unlawful killings, and suggests that France and the US may have been aware of the crimes.⁵¹ In 2015, the US also deployed a small contingent of 20 operators to Niger to train Nigerien forces for their operations against Boko Haram in Diffa.⁵² There is now a total of 800 troops in Niger under the US Africa Command (AFRICOM), and the US is establishing a drone base in the country.⁵³ On 4 October 2017, about 50 fighters from an ISIS-affiliated group ambushed a Nigerien patrol near the village of Tongo Tongo and killed four US soldiers from a US Special Operations Task Force team that was accompanying the patrol.⁵⁴

Some reports suggest that US SOF are also embedded in military facilities in N'Djamena in Chad. US forces are also understood to be supporting operations against Boko Haram with UAV surveillance and reconnaissance flights from their bases in Agadez in Niger and Garoua in Cameroon.⁵⁵

In 2016, US Special Operations Command Africa (SOCAFRICA) recommended a limited 'advise and assist' mission deployment to Nigeria; however, it is unlikely that the Obama administration would have authorised the deployment because of sensitivities over the Nigerian military's human rights record. The current US president, Donald Trump, is apparently keen to reach a new agreement with Buhari that enables the US to supply both weapons and military assistance to Nigeria.⁵⁶

Representatives of the MNJTF attended the African Chiefs of Defence Conference at the US Africa Command headquarters in Stuttgart, Germany, on 19-20 April 2017. After the event, the commanders of AFRICOM and the MNJTF, General Thomas Waldhauser and Major General Lamidi Adeosun respectively, held a press briefing where they noted that the split between the Boko Haram factions led by Barnawi and Shekau is aiding MNJTF operations against the militants, though this may be overly optimistic and based on a belief that disunity within Boko Haram is the key to its demise. Waldhauser indicated that the Trump administration's support for counter-terrorism operations in the Lake Chad region would remain unchanged, and will continue to emphasise 'African solutions to African problems'. This suggests that the White House is disinclined to support the fight against Boko Haram by deploying additional US personnel to the Lake Chad region.

In addition, AFRICOM sponsors Exercise Flintlock, an annual three-week SOF training exercise that includes service personnel from more than 20 African, European and North American partner countries, including most of the countries in the MNJTF. Seven African countries hosted the most recent exercise, which took place in March 2017.

Between 2009 and 2016, the US exported \$134 million worth of arms to Nigeria, \$13 million worth to Cameroon, \$6 million worth

to Chad and \$11 million worth to Niger. On 3 August 2017, the US State Department approved a deal to sell A-29 Super Tucano turbo-prop aircraft to Nigeria. The previous day, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency had certified to the US Congress that the sale serves US interests in the region without disrupting the balance of power.⁵⁷ The aircraft will be used against Boko Haram as well as for anti-trafficking operations in the Gulf of Guinea.⁵⁸ The contract will reportedly require the US government or private contractors from Sierra Nevada Corporation to provide Nigeria with rules of engagement and operational training and support for the Tucanos.

ii. United Kingdom

As the former colonial power, the UK has a long history in Nigeria. Relations between the two countries have been particularly robust since the return of democracy in Nigeria in 1999 after two periods under military rule.

The UK's biggest commitment is the British Military Advisory and Training Team (BMATT), previously known as the British Defence Advisory Team (BDAT). The BDAT was created in 2001, with a single British officer assisting the Nigerian military to professionalise. In 2008, this shifted to a broader peacekeeping role, and the command was moved to Lagos. In June 2015, the BMATT's role was refocused back to training and capacity building. The team was assigned 30 personnel and given a permanent mandate.⁵⁹ The BMATT provides for different British elements to work together, and is supported by successive Short Term Training Teams (STTT) which act to improve the readiness of the Nigerian armed forces in the face of Boko Haram attacks.⁶⁰

The British Army's main assets in Africa are focused on providing training and military assistance in Kenya and Sierra Leone, including to Kenyan forces combatting al-Shabaab in Somalia. In March 2015, the then British Foreign Secretary, Philip Hammond, announced that the UK would also be contributing £5 million to the MNJTF.⁶¹

In January 2016, the then UK Defence Secretary, Sir Michael Fallon, announced that the British government would provide up to 300 personnel from the British Army and Royal Air Force over the year to help train the Nigerian armed forces in what is thought to be a temporary enhancement of the resident BMATT.⁶² For example, soldiers from the Royal Anglian Regiment trained Nigerian Army and Navy personnel during a four-month deployment at the Nigerian School of Infantry and specialists from 101 Engineer Regiment provided training on how to disable improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The British government states that the programme also includes training in infantry skills, civil-military affairs, media operations, command and leadership, IED-awareness, and support to Nigerian military training establishments.⁶³

The UK also supports a Nigerian intelligence and analysis cell based in Abuja but focussed on the northeast of the country.⁶⁴ This has also been described as an intelligence fusion cell, where British, US and French intelligence officers work alongside Nigerian colleagues, most likely DSS officers, to process geospatial intelligence (GEOINT) and signals intelligence (SIGINT).⁶⁵

In December 2016, Fallon confirmed a new regional British Defence Staff (BDS) for West Africa. The BDS is based in Abuja and engages Nigeria and other Lake Chad countries, with a focus on the transnational threats from Boko Haram.⁶⁶ It is designed to show a permanent military support for Nigeria and provides a coordination headquarters for UK and other foreign forces deployed to the area.

In June 2017, the UK Ministry of Defence sent a BMATT to Nigeria in the third deployment of a five-year programme that followed a Boko Haram attack on Maiduguri base in 2013 where some air assets were destroyed.⁶⁷ The personnel from No. 5 Royal Air Force Protection Wing trained 300 Nigerian Air Force personnel to better protect air bases from ground attack.⁶⁸ The RAF's 51 Squadron also trains the NAF in countering IEDs, tracking insurgents, navigation and identifying weapons caches and the Nigerian Army in ground-to-air coordination.⁶⁹

On 31 August 2017, the British Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, visited Nigeria and unveiled a £200 million aid budget. The five-year package will help prevent 1.5 million people from falling into poverty and keep 100,000 children in education. The money will also be used to develop infrastructure and services.⁷⁰

iii. France

France has taken a less direct role than the US and UK in supporting the fight against Boko Haram. French special forces and ISR assets in Africa are predominately dedicated to Operation Barkhane, which targets Islamic extremists in Mali, Chad and Niger. The operation is headquartered in N'Djamena in Chad, and includes Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger (known as the G5 Sahel). There are an estimated 3,500 French troops associated with Operation Barkhane. France also has personnel stationed in Djibouti, Cote d'Ivoire and Gabon. It is unclear what assets are deployed from these bases against Boko Haram, though it appears that France predominately leverages its presence in Niger and Chad to provide some ISR support to the MNJTF. France has also committed financial support for the fight against Boko Haram in the form of €25 million in military funding and €17 million for humanitarian support to the four Lake Chad countries.

A French delegation led by the Minister for Armed Services, Florence Parly, visited the Multinational Joint Taskforce headquarters in Ndjamenia on 31 July 2017. During the meeting, the MNJTF commander, Lucky Irabor, expressed gratitude for France's consistent support against Boko Haram. Parly noted that the delegation was interested in applying the lessons learned by the MNJTF in the G5 Sahel Joint Force.⁷¹

iv. Russia

Russian special forces have reportedly provided limited training to Nigerian and Cameroonian forces. In September 2014, Russia hosted 400 Nigerian SOF operators for four months while Russian instructors provided training in COIN tactics.⁷² This was extended to a further 800 SOF operators in late 2014 and in 2015.⁷³

Russian media reports suggest that Nigeria is purchasing 12 Su-30 fighter jets from the Moscow-based Sukhoi Company. Two of the \$30 million aircraft have already been delivered. The Su-30s will most likely be used by the Nigerian Air Force in air-to-ground operations against Boko Haram.

The Nigerian Foreign Minister, Geoffrey Onyeama, visited Russia on 1 June 2017 for bilateral talks on economic development and military co-operation. Onyeama told the media that Nigeria was negotiating the purchase of Russian military hardware, including helicopters, to aid Nigerian military operations against Boko Haram. Onyeama also highlighted the importance of Russian intelligence sharing and Russia's potential role as a bulwark in the UN Security Council against any budget cuts to UN peacekeeping missions in Africa. In January, the Nigerian government had received two of the multirole Mi-35M (Hind) attack helicopters it purchased from Russian Helicopters in September 2015. The new round of negotiations included the delivery schedule for the remaining 10 Mi-35Ms Nigeria purchased, which will be delivered in 2018. Two further helicopters are due for delivery in 2018. Nigeria is also considering buying MiG fighters, Yak-130 aircraft and various military vehicles from Russia.⁷⁴

The Defence Minister of Nigeria, Mansur Dan Ali, held talks with Russia's Defence Minister, Sergei Shoigu, on the sidelines of the International Army Games 2017 forum held in Moscow on 23 August. The meeting resulted in a new bilateral military cooperation and training agreement. The agreement reportedly includes joint troop training, peacekeeping exchanges and counter-terrorism and piracy training. The bilateral agreement is likely to underpin further arms deals between the two countries, which the Nigerian defence minister flagged to journalists reporting on the games. Specifically, Ali was quoted as saying that Nigeria is looking to procure Yakovlev Yak-130 trainer aircraft and mine-resistant vehicles.

v. Other international forces

In addition to the US, the UK, France and Russia, other international actors have supported the fight against Boko Haram. For example, in August 2016, the European Union agreed to contribute €50 million from its African Peace Facility for the creation of the MNJTF headquarters in Chad and sector headquarters in Cameroon and Niger.⁷⁵ It also provided transport and communication assets for the force headquarters to support effective command, control and communication (C3). Canadian special forces have also provided counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism training to Niger and Nigeria.⁷⁶

The MNJTF partners may also receive ancillary training and maintenance support linked to arms purchases. Analysis of SIPRI data reveals that, alongside Russia and the US, China and Ukraine are also substantial arms exporters to West Africa. Between 2009 and 2016, China alone exported \$271 million worth of arms to Nigeria, \$198 million worth to Cameroon, \$55 million worth to Chad and \$1 million worth to Niger. Nigeria is known to have Israeli- and locally-made surveillance UAVs as well as Chinese armed drones. Indeed, the Nigerian Air Force released a video of an air strike from a Chinese-made drone on a Boko Haram logistics base in February 2016. Nigeria also benefits from an important intelligence-sharing agreement with China, agreed in the aftermath of the Chibok schoolgirls kidnapping.⁷⁷

Nigeria has confirmed that it has purchased five Super Mushshak light attack aircraft from Pakistan and ordered a further nine.⁷⁸ The aircraft can be used for both training pilots and in light attack roles. It will bolster the already well-equipped Nigerian Air Force and allow the government to continue light air missions against Boko Haram, which is a centre-piece of their anti-Boko Haram strategy. The Pakistani Army's Special Service Group (SSG) has also conducted CT training courses for Nigerian Army SOF battalions.⁷⁹

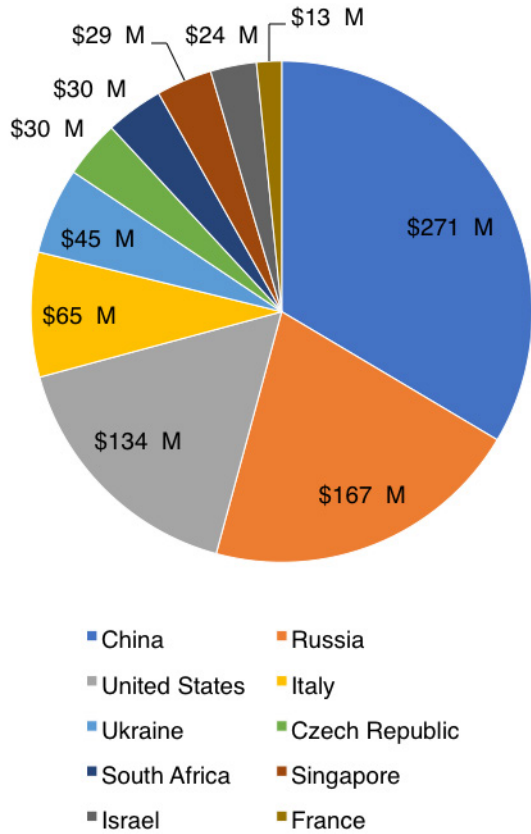


Figure 4. Arms exporters to Nigeria by trend-indicator value (2009-16). Source: SIPRI, 2016.

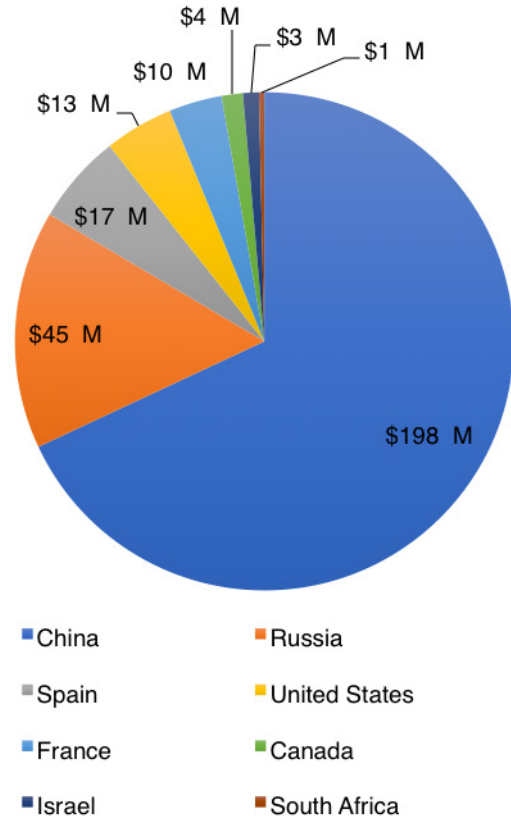


Figure 5. Arms exporters to Cameroon by trend-indicator value (2009-16). Source: SIPRI, 2016.

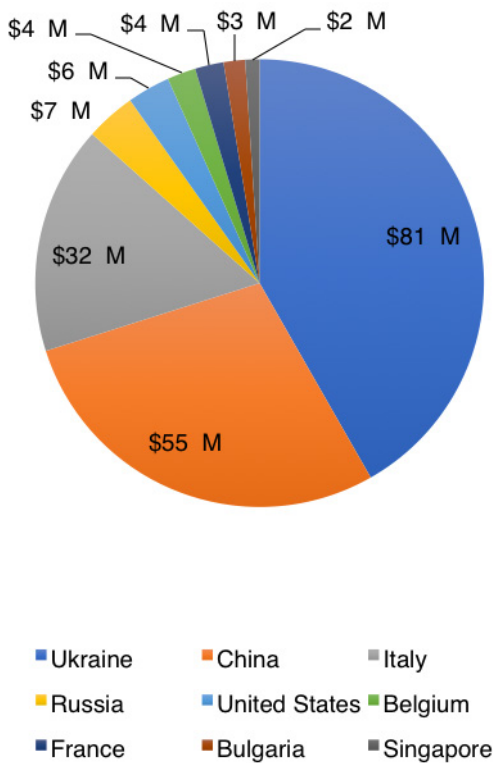


Figure 6. Arms exporters to Chad by trend-indicator value (2009-16). Source: SIPRI, 2016.

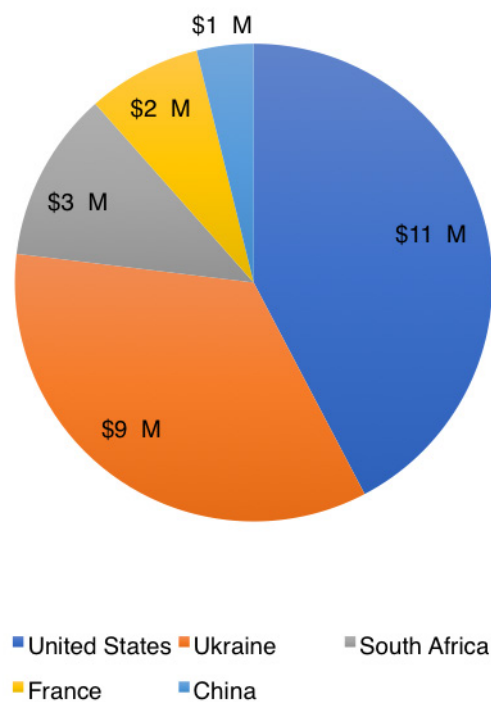


Figure 7. Arms exporters to Niger by trend-indicator value (2009-16). Source: SIPRI, 2016.

4. Analysis of attacks by defence and security actors

The secrecy surrounding remote warfare makes it challenging to identify how effective it has been in supporting local forces to eradicate Boko Haram and reduce the frequency and intensity of their attacks.⁸⁰ However, we can posit some conclusions from open sources.

We have drawn on multiple spatial and non-spatial data sources to evaluate the temporal, geographical, biophysical, demographical and contextual dimensions of attacks, counter-attacks and other conflict events on and with Boko Haram (referred to collectively as ‘attacks’ in this report). In many cases, the data is divided into two distinct sets: January 2009 to December 2016 and January to September 2017. This is to enable a comparison between the insurgency as it is today and historical trends. (See Appendix 1 for data sources.)

Since reclaiming territory from the group in late 2015 and through 2016, the Nigerian government has repeatedly claimed that it has defeated Boko Haram. At the same, the Nigerian Air Force has continued ISR operations and targeted attacks alongside clearance operations by the Nigerian Army. This suggests that the Nigerian government does not really believe that they have yet successfully destroyed Boko Haram. Nigerian operations are predominantly focussed on neutralising high-value targets within the Boko Haram leadership – potentially, as they were trained to do by foreign SOF trainers and with intelligence from foreign airborne ISR platforms. More recently, mobile strike teams have been

deployed in an attempt at preventing the increasing Boko Haram attacks on soft targets.⁸¹

While it is not possible from open sources to pinpoint the support of foreign forces on a mission-by-mission basis, it is possible to speculate from known relationships and programmes that such forces have been providing advisory support and intelligence sharing. International actors – such as the US, UK and France – have worked by, with and through local and regional actors, providing air support and ISR to their anti-Boko Haram operations. For example, it appears US UAV ISR assets are being used to support counterterrorism missions along the Borno State (Nigeria)/Extreme Nord (Cameroon) border and Lake Chad region and that British RAF and Army are training Nigerian Air Force personnel. Nigeria also appears to have employed mercenaries and armed drones against the group.

While these techniques had some initial success in weakening the group, there is emerging awareness among those arrayed against Boko Haram that the group is adopting new tactics. Increasing suicide and small arms attacks against soft targets, such as IDP camps, hospitals, education facilities and market places, most likely conducted by Shekau-aligned fighters, are drawing the Nigerian military, law enforcement and CJTF forces into major population centres and onto major road corridors. Military responses to this new conflict dynamic may need to focus on a more defensive posture around Maiduguri in order to deny Boko Haram opportunities for symbolic and functional political violence. The ability of remote warfare to support defensive, area-denial measures is unclear.

Table 1. Presence or not of the various elements of remote warfare in national forces operations against Boko Haram.

	Regional				International		
	Nigeria	Cameroon	Chad	Niger	US	UK	France
Special operations forces		
Private military contractors	.						
Armed UAVs	.						
Cyber offensives							
ISR
Frontline training operations					.	.	.

* France has ISR assets in Niger, Chad and Mali focused on other counter-terrorism campaigns, but is likely to occasionally obtain intelligence related to Boko Haram that it may pass on to the MNJTF and other foreign forces.

a. Primary actors

Throughout 2017, the Nigerian military has conducted the largest proportion of armed attacks against suspected Boko Haram fighters (figure 8). This is consistent with the historical campaign against Boko Haram (figure 9). The role of vigilante militias appears to have diminished since the establishment of the more-formal Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF). The participation of the CJTF in armed offensives should not

be underestimated, however. While only 4% of attacks against Boko Haram are led by the CJTF as the primary actor, the force is identified as a secondary actor in a number of Nigerian military actions against Boko Haram. Overall, the diversity and number of primary actors involved in attacks on Boko Haram has declined from historical trends. This is likely a result of more spatial-concentrated attacks and the fact that the weakened insurgency does not necessitate the same level of COIN operations.

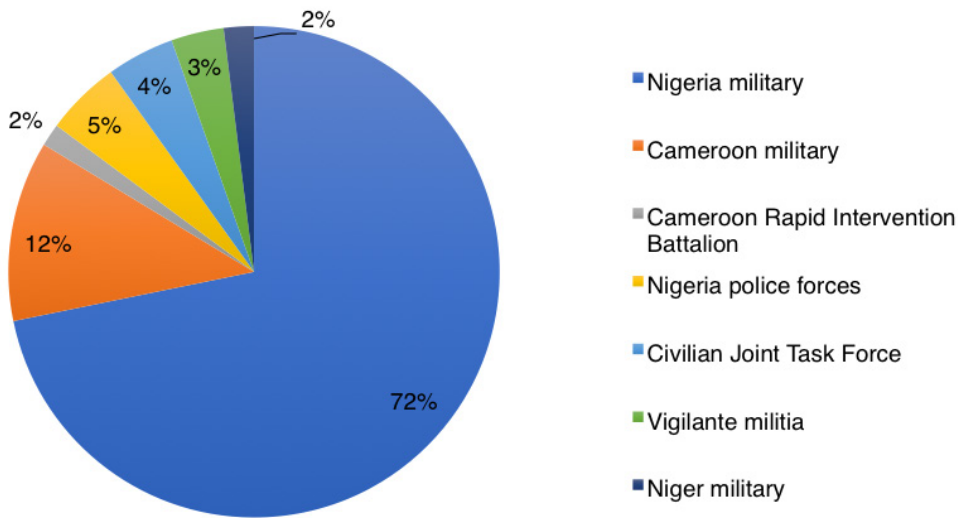


Figure 8. Armed offensives against Boko Haram by primary actor (January-September 2017). Source: ACLED, 2017.

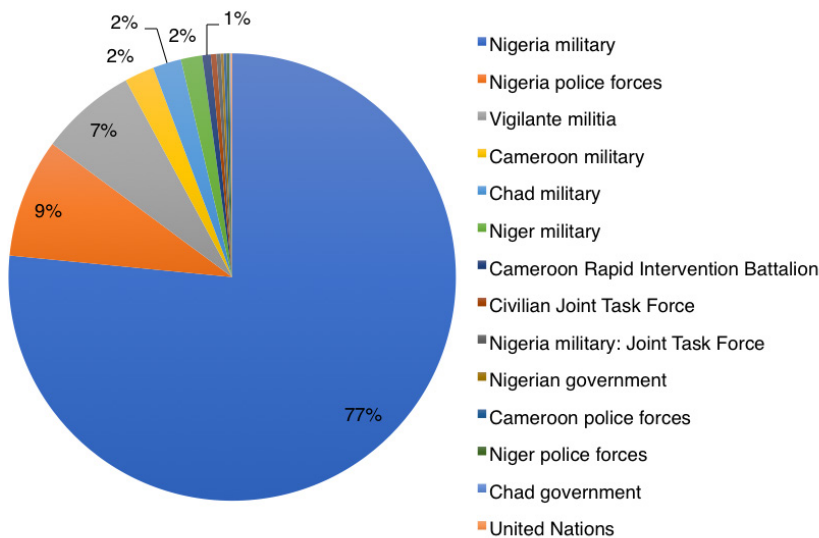


Figure 9. Armed offensives against Boko Haram by primary actor (January 2009 to December 2016). Source: ACLED, 2017.*

* 'Government' in this context refers to all relevant agencies of the state other than the military and police, and may include intelligence and customs agencies, for example.

b. Lethality

The lethality (the number of estimated fatalities per attack) of attacks on Boko Haram does not significantly vary between military, vigilante, government and law enforcement actors. This raises questions about whether technological and tactical advantages actually translate to battlefield dominance. The variance in lethality between the different national military actors might indicate that the nature and depth of SOF advisory assistance or ISR sharing improves the lethality of attacks for those militaries supported in that way. Furthermore, variance

in lethality over time may indicate the introduction and subsequent withdrawal of such remote warfare elements.

The evident changes in lethality over time are driven by a number of factors. A combination of increasing surrenders by Boko Haram fighters during confrontations and a focus from military and law enforcement actors on detaining militants for intelligence is likely causing a reduction in attack lethality. More broadly, a shift in the balance between pre-planned and reactive attacks is also likely to have reduced attack lethality.

Table 2. Average fatalities per attack by primary actor. Source: ACLED, 2017.

Primary actor	Average fatalities per attack (Jan 2009 to Dec 2016)	Average fatalities per attack (Jan 2017 to Sep 2017)
Nigeria military	12.1	6.3
Nigeria police forces	4.0	0.8
Civilian Joint Task Force	1.8	4.3
Cameroon military	11.3	5.2
Cameroon Rapid Intervention Battalion	0.8	1.3
Cameroon police forces	3.0	-
Chad military	31.9	-
Niger military	11.1	16.2
UN forces	20.0	-
Vigilante militia	13.7	2.6

c. Outcomes

The key change in conflict interactions with Boko Haram in 2017 is the decrease in the number of attacks that led to regaining territory from the group. This is largely due to the significant territory that the Nigerian military and MNJTF retook from Boko Haram in 2015 and 2016 spurred by the international attention around the Chibok schoolgirl kidnappings. The increase in ‘remote violence’ conflict interactions suggests that direct conflict between defence and security actors and Boko Haram in the form of battles over territory is reducing and being replaced with more indirect missile and mortar attacks.

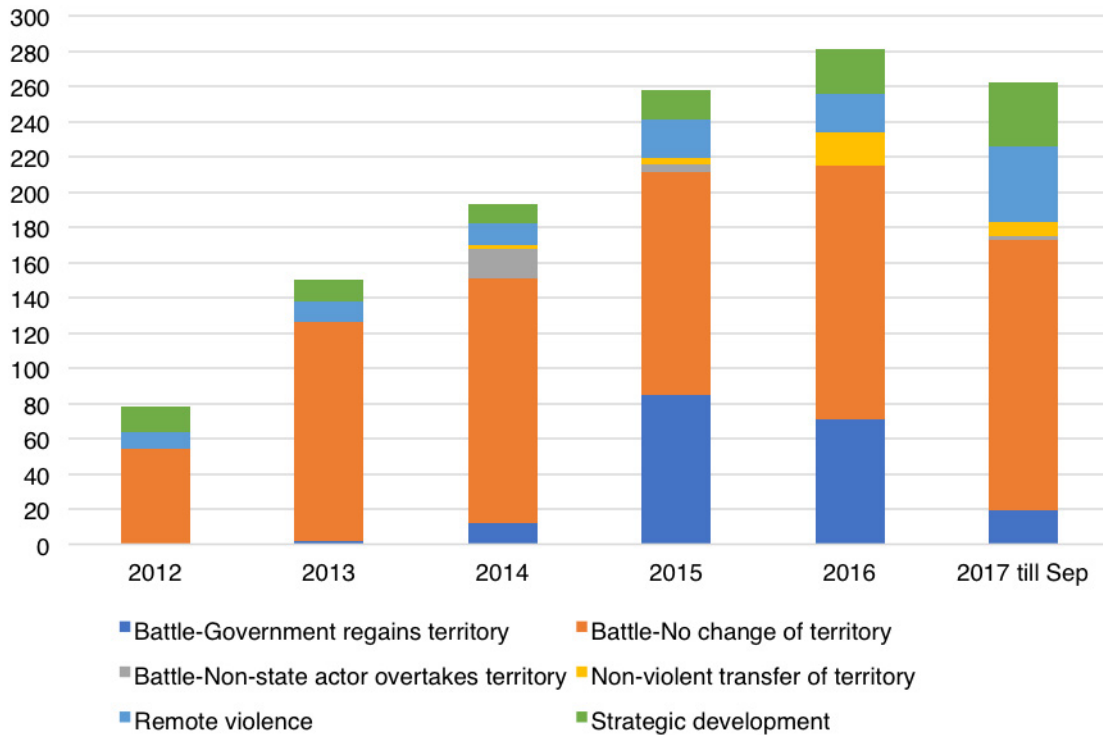


Figure 10. Outcome of conflict events (2012-2017). Source: GTD, 2016.

d. Location

The location of attacks against Boko Haram provides some insight into the tactics and capabilities of the various forces arrayed against the group. Armed attacks against Boko Haram since January 2017 have been concentrated in the larger population centres of Maiduguri, Gwoza, Bama and Konduga local government areas (figure 11),

which is largely consistent with historical attacks and the locations that Boko Haram had previously seized territory (figure 12). Greater spatial resolution on attack locations would be required to understand specific changes in historical trends. The concentration of attacks on Boko Haram is spatially represented in the heat maps in figures 15 and 16.

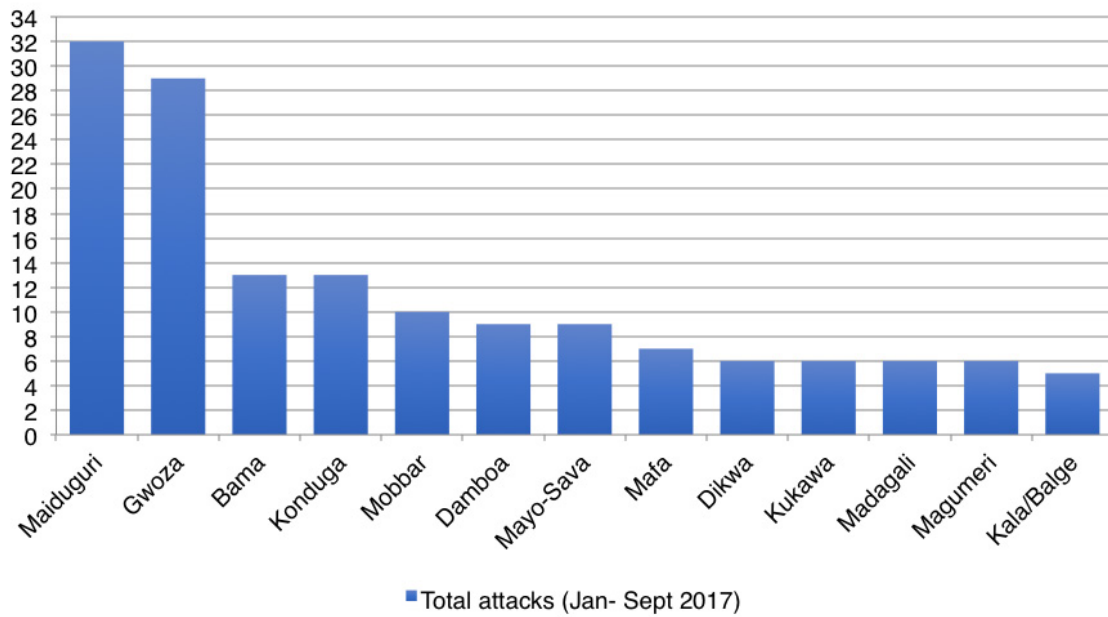


Figure 11. Armed offensives against Boko Haram by location (Jan-Sept 2017). Source: ACLED, 2017.

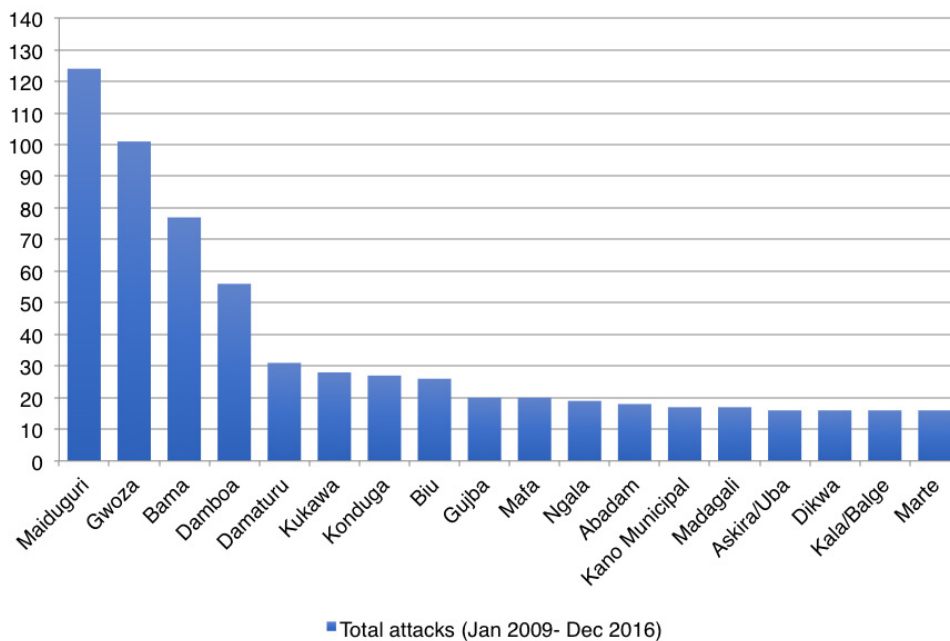


Figure 12. Armed offensives against Boko Haram by location (Jan 2009-Dec 2016). Source: ACLED, 2017.

Attacks on Boko Haram are concentrated in key locations and along road corridors. There are two likely factors that drive the concentration of conflict interactions or attacks on key locations. Firstly, defence and security actors are focusing on key militant positions, such as Sambisa Forest, Maiduguri, Lake Chad and the border towns (particularly near Cameroon). Secondly, limitations in the availability and capabilities of Nigerian military equipment, such as troop transporters, can restrict operations to particular areas centred on the locations of bases (see figures 15 and 16). This has been a key driver behind the fixed- and rotary-wing air force acquisitions from Russia and the United States.

The use of ISR UAVs or signals intelligence to identify substantial Boko Haram convoys moving across road supply lines between captured territories may be less relevant during this phase of the conflict. Instead road checkpoints and human intelligence (HUMINT) from CJTF are more likely to be used to identify and intercept smaller movements of suspected militants. This is underscored by the fact that militants regularly destroy communication towers ahead of their attacks, most likely to disrupt the dissemination of HUMINT from local residents and CJTF members to law enforcement and military forces. (This tactic may also underscore the lack of reliance that Boko Haram has on telecommunication networks for operational command. Combined with Boko Haram's relatively limited propaganda campaign and absence of foreign fighters among its ranks, this raises questions about the effectiveness of SIGINT in the context of the Boko Haram insurgency.)

The available data also suggests that forces attacked Boko Haram more frequently in remote village and cropland environments rather than urban areas. While a significant number of attacks occurred on artificial surfaces and associated areas (figure 13), a greater proportion occurred on land classified as vegetated, rain-fed cropland or forested. An estimated 62% of attacks occurred in lower population-density areas. The high average fatalities per attack for bare areas (18.5), open grassland (16.2) and closed to open herbaceous vegetation

(16.9) is unsurprising, as military actors are more likely to better leverage air power in such areas compared to areas with denser and variable vegetation and agricultural infrastructure, which would provide militants with a degree of cover. The MNJTF predominantly led the attacks in areas with limited vegetation or infrastructure cover and lower population densities.

This should not overshadow the fact that conflict interactions with Boko Haram do occur in relatively-denser urban environments. Defence and security actors are more likely to be constrained in the tactics that they can use in these environments due to risks of civilian casualties and damage to infrastructure. The comparatively lower number of attacks in urban environments may be a combination of limited access to SOF assets and Boko Haram militants not being located in urban environments (figure 14).

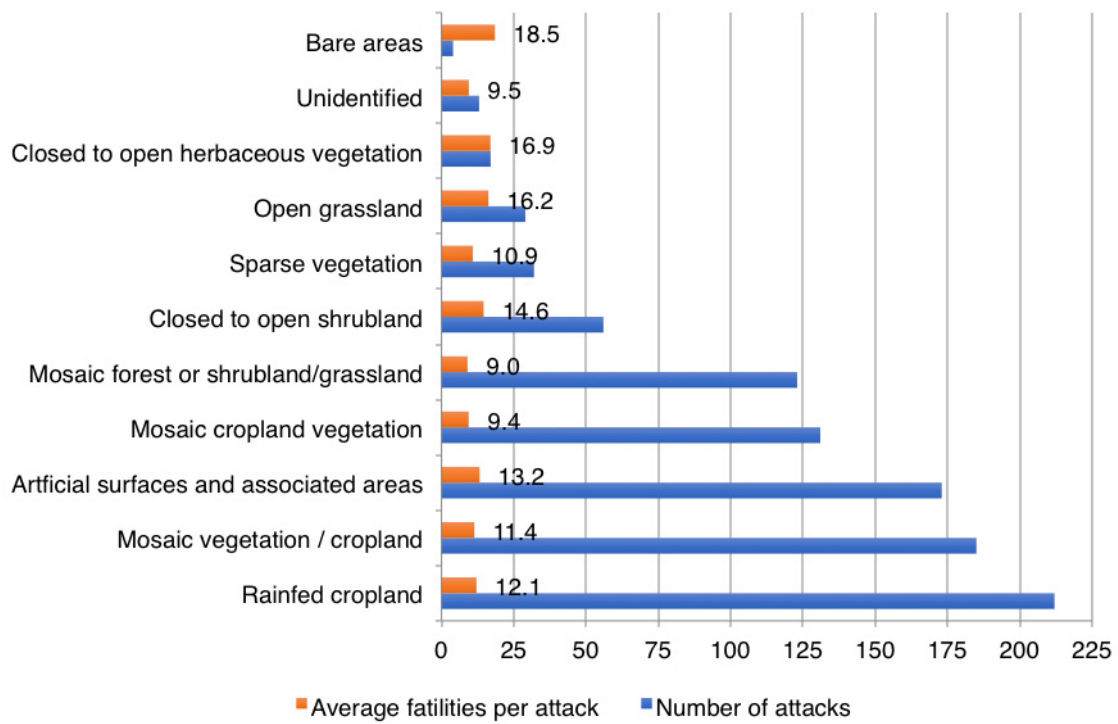


Figure 13. Lethality and number of attacks by land-cover classification. Sources: ACLED, 2017; GlobCover, 2009.

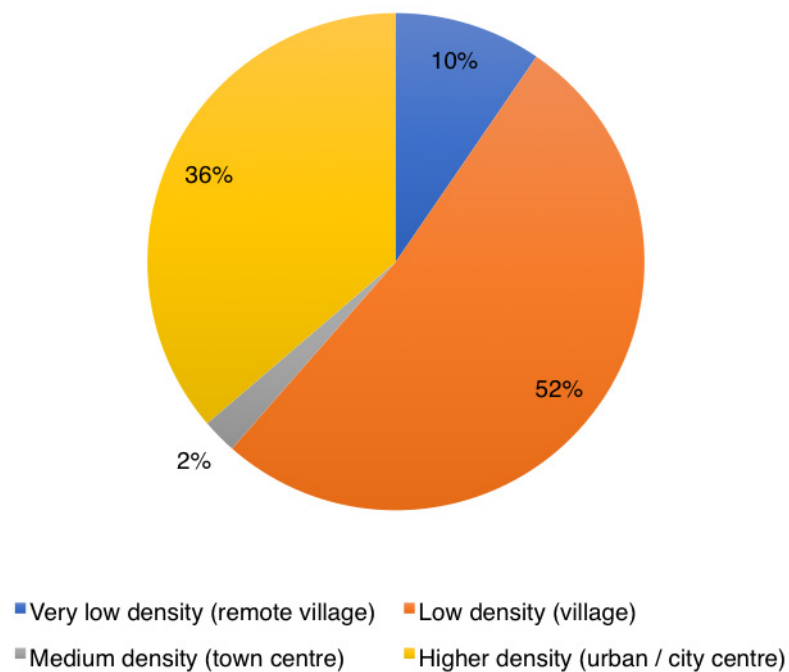


Figure 14. Population density of attack locations. Sources: ACLED, 2017; UNOCHA, 2012.

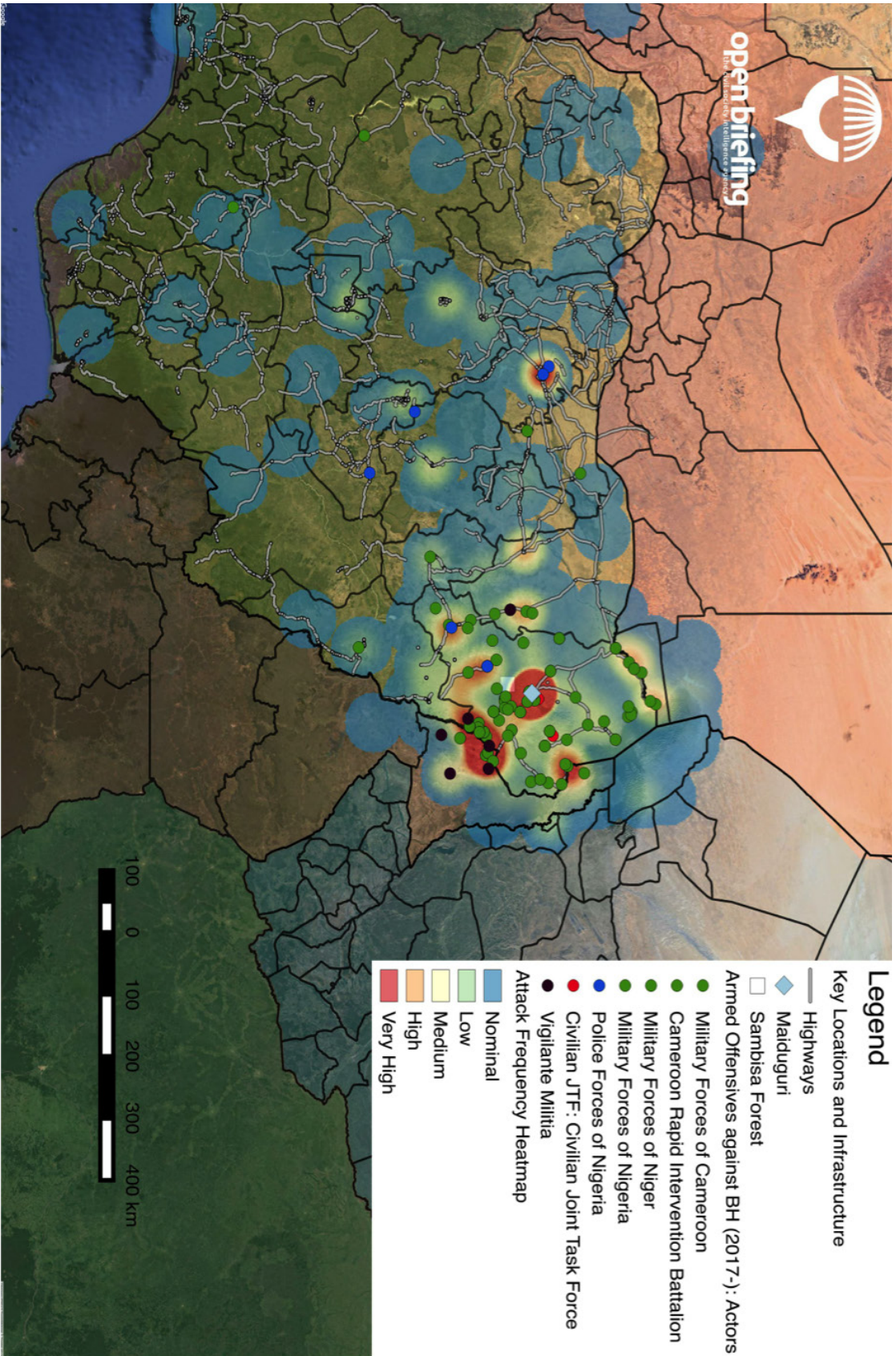


Figure 15. Conflict events and armed offensives against Boko Haram (Jan-Sept 2017). Source: ACLED, 2017.

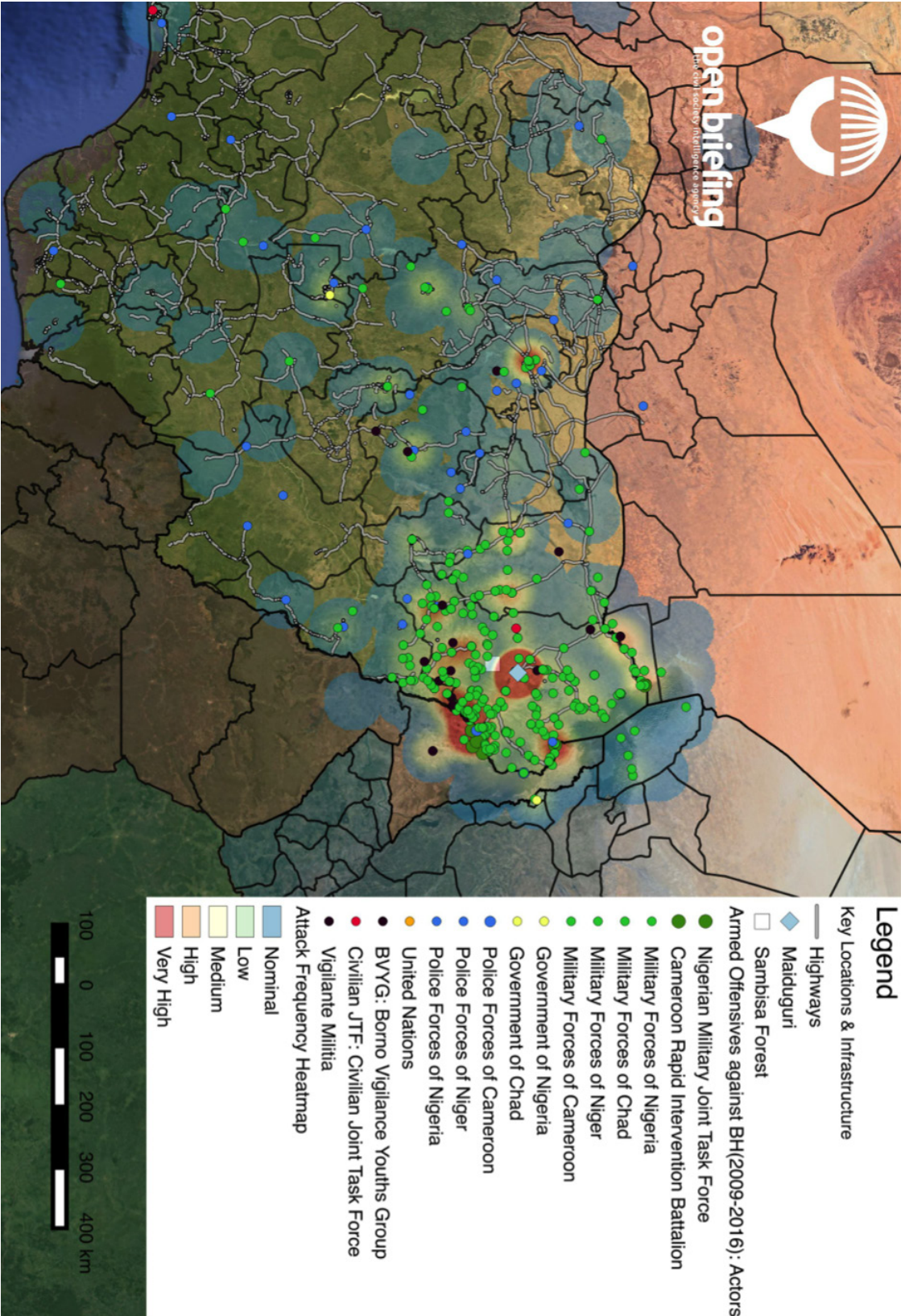


Figure 16. Conflict events and armed offensives against Boko Haram (Jan 2009-Dec 2016). Source: ACLED, 2017.

5. Analysis of attacks by Boko Haram

Initially, international efforts to bolster local and regional forces in their fight against Boko Haram were relatively successful. Boko Haram experienced significant battlefield losses during 2015 and 2016. The Nigerian Air Force claimed some key Boko Haram leadership targets, the introduction of private military forces stalled the routing of the Nigerian Army, civilian taskforces have improved HUMINT on militant movements and MNJTF partners helped Nigeria reclaim territory from the militants.

However, a definitive battlefield victory for the Nigerian military and its regional partners remains elusive. This is due in part to the way in which Boko Haram has adapted its tactics in response to its degraded capabilities and the reduced opportunities it has for both attacks on civilians and criminal enterprise. Furthermore, despite the evolving nature of the insurgency, Maiduguri, the Borno/Extreme Nord border and the shores of Lake Chad remain both symbolic and functional strategic attack nodes for Boko Haram.

Boko Haram's purpose for carrying out attacks in each of the strategic nodes is different, and so the tactics that the militants use in each area are different. In Maiduguri, Boko Haram is focussed on creating fear within local communities and the population of internally displaced people (IDPs) in the area. As such, militants continue to carry out suicide attacks and opportunistic attacks and robberies on soft targets.

In the border region between Nigeria's Borno State and Cameroon's Extreme Nord province, Boko Haram seeks to create the impression of battlefield dominance and degrade the civilian population's confidence in military and law enforcement actors to secure their safety. As such, militants exploit intelligence-sharing and jurisdictional gaps between the MNJTF members to launch attacks on law enforcement personnel and military units on one side of the border before retreating to the other.

In Lake Chad, Boko Haram's attacks are purposed at controlling resources within the territory that help support its fighters. Boko Haram uses violence to generate insecurity in the area that discourages civilians from fishing and agriculture and enables the militants to secure these resources for themselves.

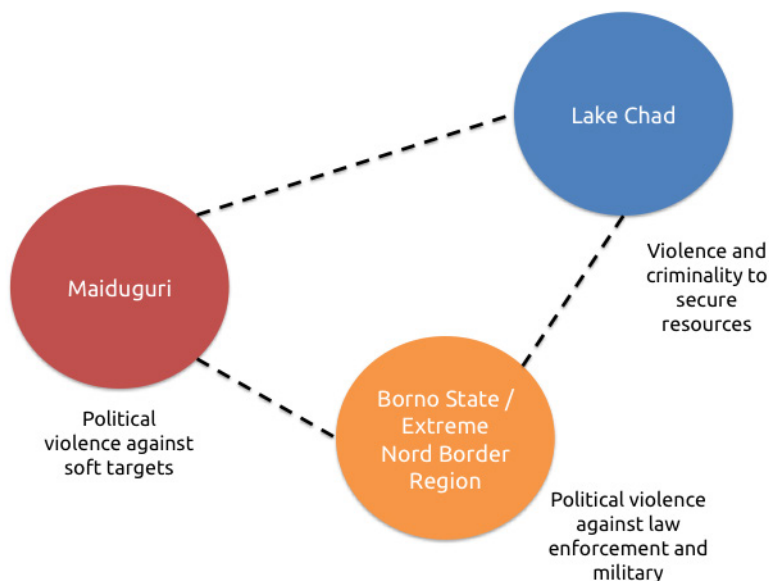


Figure 17. Boko Haram's strategic attack nodes.

Each strategic attack node creates unique challenges for the defence and security actors active in that area. In some cases, a more defensive posture that denies access to soft targets or hardens particular infrastructure may be more effective. In June 2017, the governor of Borno State, Kashim Shettima, approved funds for the installation of a 27km trench around the University of Maiduguri.⁸² CJTF patrols are another example of this defensive approach. This could be enhanced by extending such protection to IDP camps and food and medical supply centres.

In other cases, this posture is now complemented by the reactive deployment of mobile strike teams that would benefit from advisory support from SOF personnel. However, this would likely create substantial reputational risk for those that participated given the poor human rights record of elements within the Nigerian military and law enforcement agencies and the danger of miscalculation and civilian casualties associated with reactive mobile strike teams. As such, the opportunities to apply remote warfare tactics against Boko Haram remain limited.

a. Frequency

The data presented in figure 18 shows the lull in attacks as Boko Haram went underground following its uprising and the subsequent execution of Yusuf in 2009 and then the steady rise in attacks under Shekau, since Boko Haram emerged in 2010 as a full insurgency. In 2013, the then Nigerian President, Goodluck Jonathan, declared a state of emergency in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states and initiated a troop surge, which accounts for the further lull in Boko Haram attacks that year. However, except for 2013, the frequency of attacks rose steadily until the peak in 2015, after which superior air power and sustained ground clearance operations throughout 2015 and 2016 severely degraded Boko Haram’s capabilities. While the downwards trend appears to be continuing over 2017, recent spikes in attacks by Boko Haram may result in a higher attack frequency this year than for 2016.⁸³

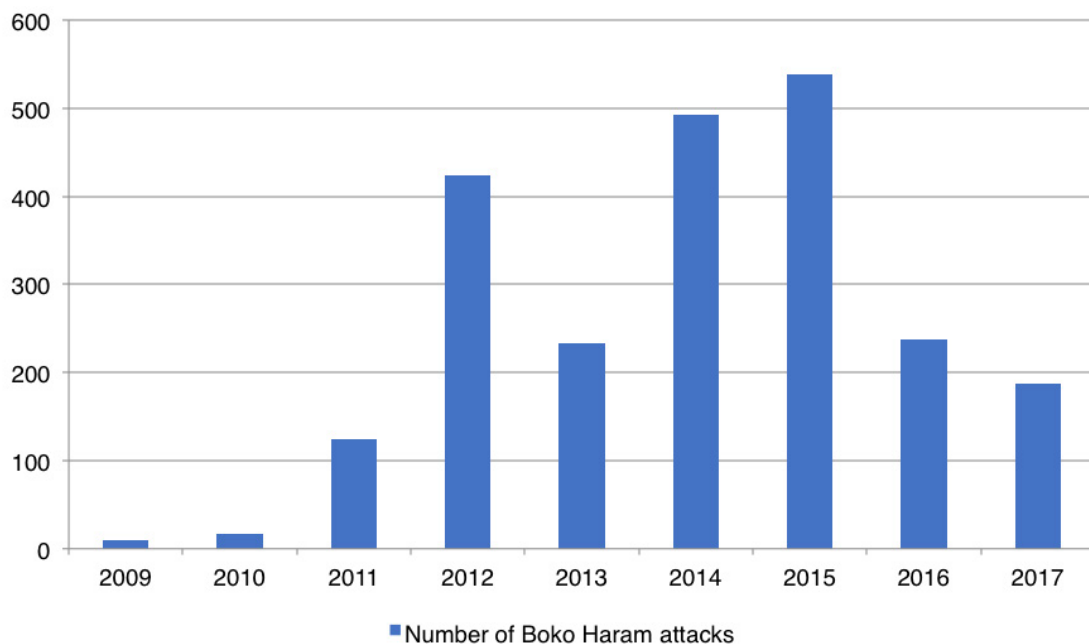


Figure 18. Number of Boko Haram attacks (Jan 2009-Sept 2017). Source: GTD, 2016; ACLED, 2017.

b. Targets

Boko Haram, particularly Shekau's faction, has consistently targeted civilians in the Lake Chad countries. The group has carried out most of its attacks in north-eastern Nigeria and northern Cameroon. While audacious attacks on law enforcement infrastructure have garnered greater political and media attention, historical trends show that Boko Haram have predominantly targeted civilians. Data from January to September 2017, shows that attacks on civilians have increased as a proportion of all Boko Haram conflict events. Based on a comparison of datasets classes (civilian and non-civilian) from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) and the Armed Conflict Location & Event

Data Project (ACLED), 45% per cent of all Boko Haram attacks between 2009 and 2016 were on civilians, whereas almost 71% of Boko Haram attacks in 2017 were on civilians.

The renewed focus on civilian attacks is likely due to two factors. Firstly, Boko Haram's capabilities have been degraded to the point where the group may struggle to initiate larger-scale swarm attacks designed overrun hardened military and law enforcement targets and must instead focus on soft targets. Secondly, the premature return of Nigerian refugees to their home states by the Cameroonian and Nigerian governments has increased the opportunities for attacks on civilians.⁸⁴

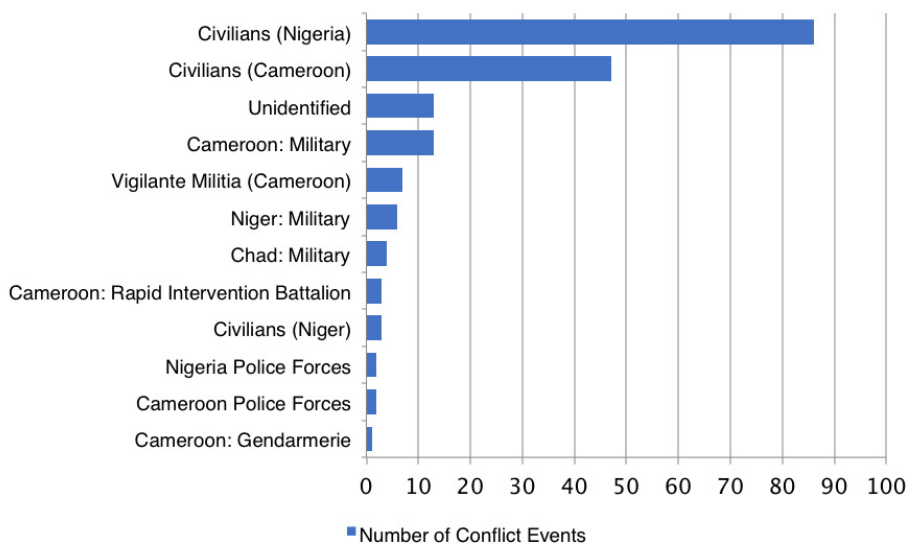


Figure 19. Boko Haram attacks by target (Jan-Sept 2017). Source: ACLED, 2017.

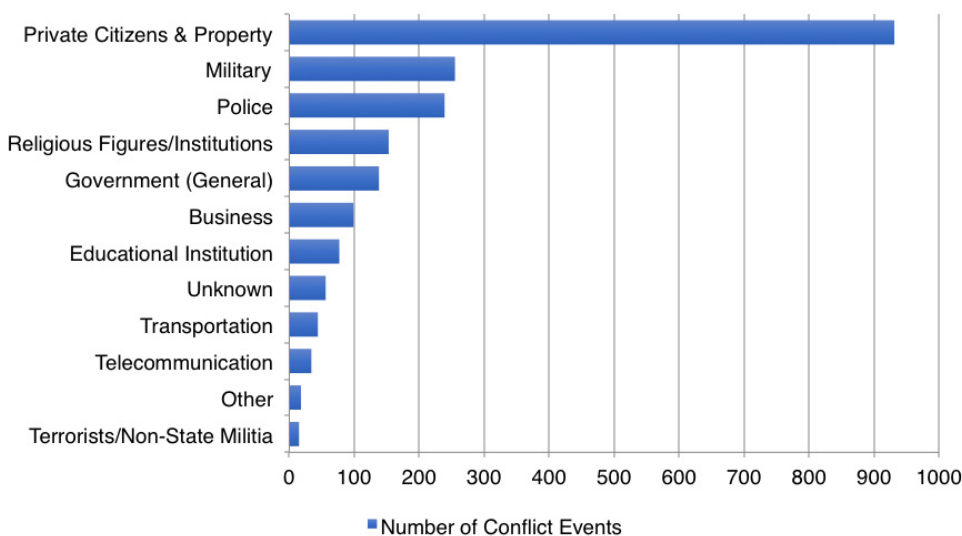


Figure 20. Boko Haram attacks by target (2009-16). Source: GTD, 2017.

c. Tactics

Boko Haram’s recently-reduced ability to launch larger-scale swarm attacks is somewhat reflected in the data. According to the GTD, approximately 17% of all Boko Haram attacks involved a suicide IED bombing between 2009 and 2016. Since January 2017, the proportion of Boko Haram attacks employing suicide IED bombings has increased to approximately 41% according to the ACLED. This may suggest that Boko Haram is increasingly

relying on individual suicide bombers as both their overall number of fighters and the weaponry available to them diminishes. Note, the comparative lethality of suicide attacks in 2017 has also increased substantially (doubled) in comparison to historical attacks. At this point, there are no significant indicators as to why there has been such an increase in lethality, though factors that could be investigated are Boko Haram’s use of double-tap strikes, improved target selection or changes in the IEDs used.

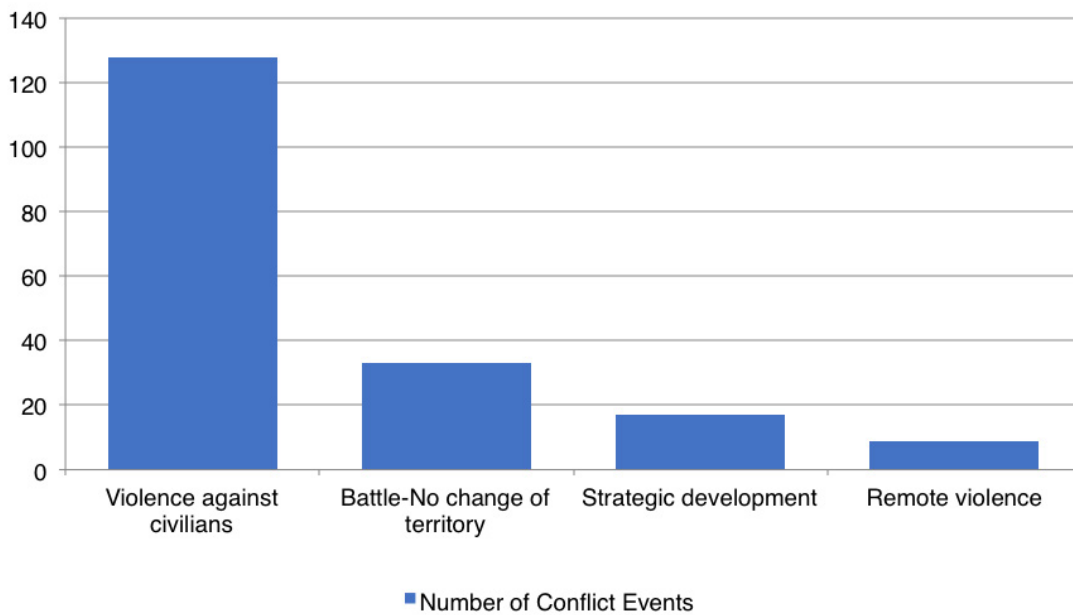


Figure 21. Boko Haram attacks by type (Jan-Sept 2017). Source: ACLED, 2017.

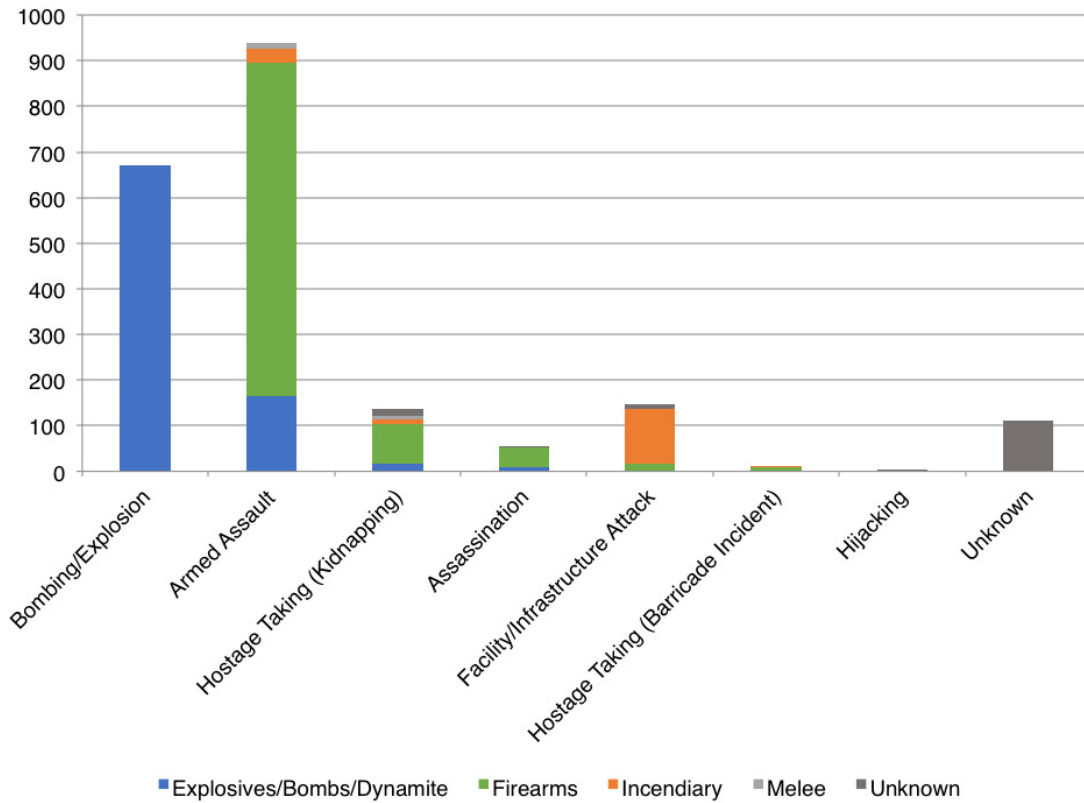


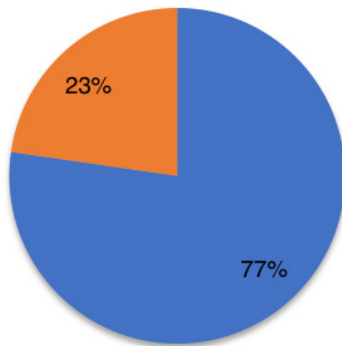
Figure 22. Boko Haram attacks by type and weapon (2009-16). Source: GTD, 2017.

The increasing use of suicide attacks was noted in an April 2017 report by UNICEF, which also observed that the number of Boko Haram suicide bombings involving children in the first half of 2017 was on par with the total for the whole of 2016.⁸⁵ In June, the Nigerian Air Force issued a press release highlighting the elevated NAF and Nigerian Army presence in the north-eastern part of the country to reduce suicide attacks of civilians.⁸⁶ In July, the Nigerian

Army issued a statement that Boko Haram militants were using double-tap strikes in which an explosion is used to draw in crowds and first responders before further IEDs are detonated to cause maximum casualties.⁸⁷ In August, the Nigerian Army deployed 2,000 mobile strike force group soldiers with special forces training in a bid to prevent Boko Haram suicide attacks on urban targets across Borno State.⁸⁸

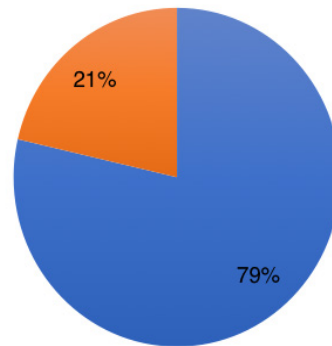
d. Location

The location of Boko Haram's attacks in 2017 did not substantially deviate from historical attack patterns. The proportion of attacks on IDP camps has not increased despite the media attention given to suicide bombing attacks on camps during Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr (figures 24 and 25). In fact, the number of attacks on IDP camps is lower than average so far in 2017 (40 attacks up to September compared to the three-year average of 93).



■ Not with 500M of IDP Camp
■ Within 500M of IDP Camp

Figure 23. Boko Haram attacks by proximity to IDP camps (2014-16). Sources: GTD, 2016; IOM, 2015.



■ Not with 500M of IDP Camp
■ Within 500M of IDP Camp

Figure 24. Boko Haram attacks by proximity to IDP camps (Jan-Sept 2017). Sources: ACLED, 2017; IOM, 2015.

It is notable that Boko Haram kidnapped the representatives of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation and geologists from the University of Maiduguri during an attack on a convoy protected by Nigerian soldiers and CJTF volunteers in July 2017.⁸⁹ The attack demonstrated that Shekau's Boko Haram faction still poses the means to carry out planned, symbolic and deadly attacks.⁹⁰ The attack reinforces the fact that key logistical routes along which food and aid are moved remain vulnerable to attacks by Boko Haram. It is likely that the attack prompted the 21 July 2017 directive from Nigeria's chief of army staff, Lieutenant General Tukur Buratai, for the military to capture Shekau within 40 days.⁹¹

One of the key locational changes in 2017 is the substantial increase in Boko Haram attacks in northern Cameroon in places such as Mora, Waza, Kolafata, Mayo Moskota and Limani, which are all in proximity to the rapid intervention battalion (BIR) base in Salek. Between 2009 and 2016, approximately 8% of Boko Haram attacks occurred in Cameroon. In 2017, approximately 42% of Boko Haram attacks have occurred in Cameroon. A comparison of the maps in figures 30 and 31 shows a concentration of attacks along the border of Cameroon's Extreme Nord province and Nigeria's Borno State. It might be that Boko Haram is finding it easier to exploit gaps in cross-border military and law enforcement coordination than confront national military forces in other locations nearer to Sambisa Forest, for example.

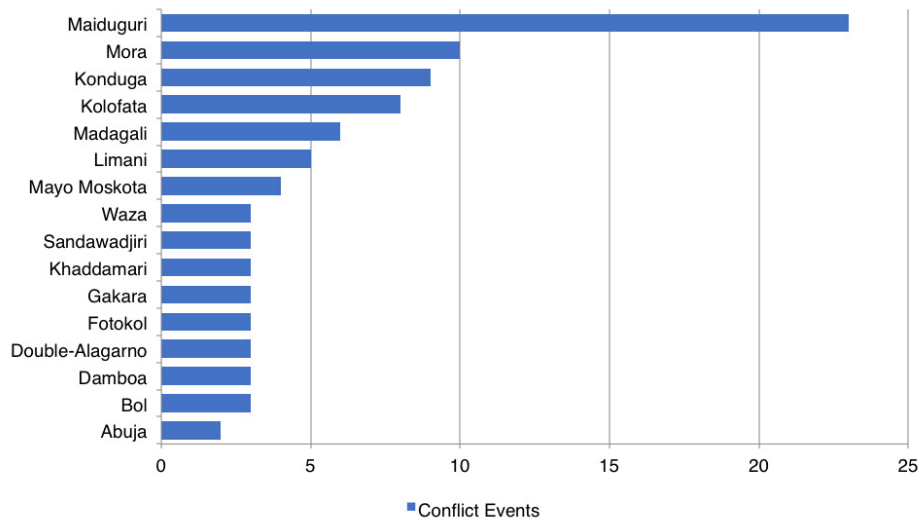


Figure 25. Boko Haram attacks by location (Jan-Sept 2017). Source: ACLED, 2017.

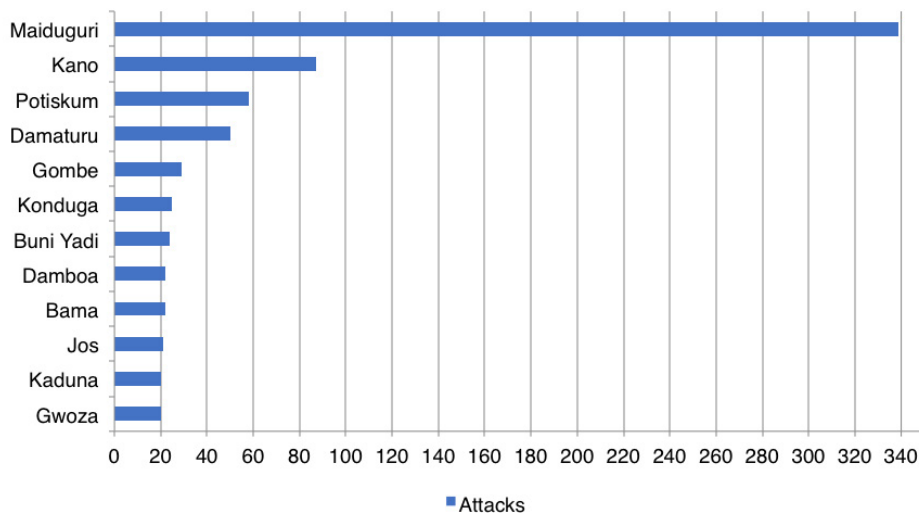


Figure 26. Boko Haram attacks by location (Jan-Sept 2017). Source: GTD, 2017.

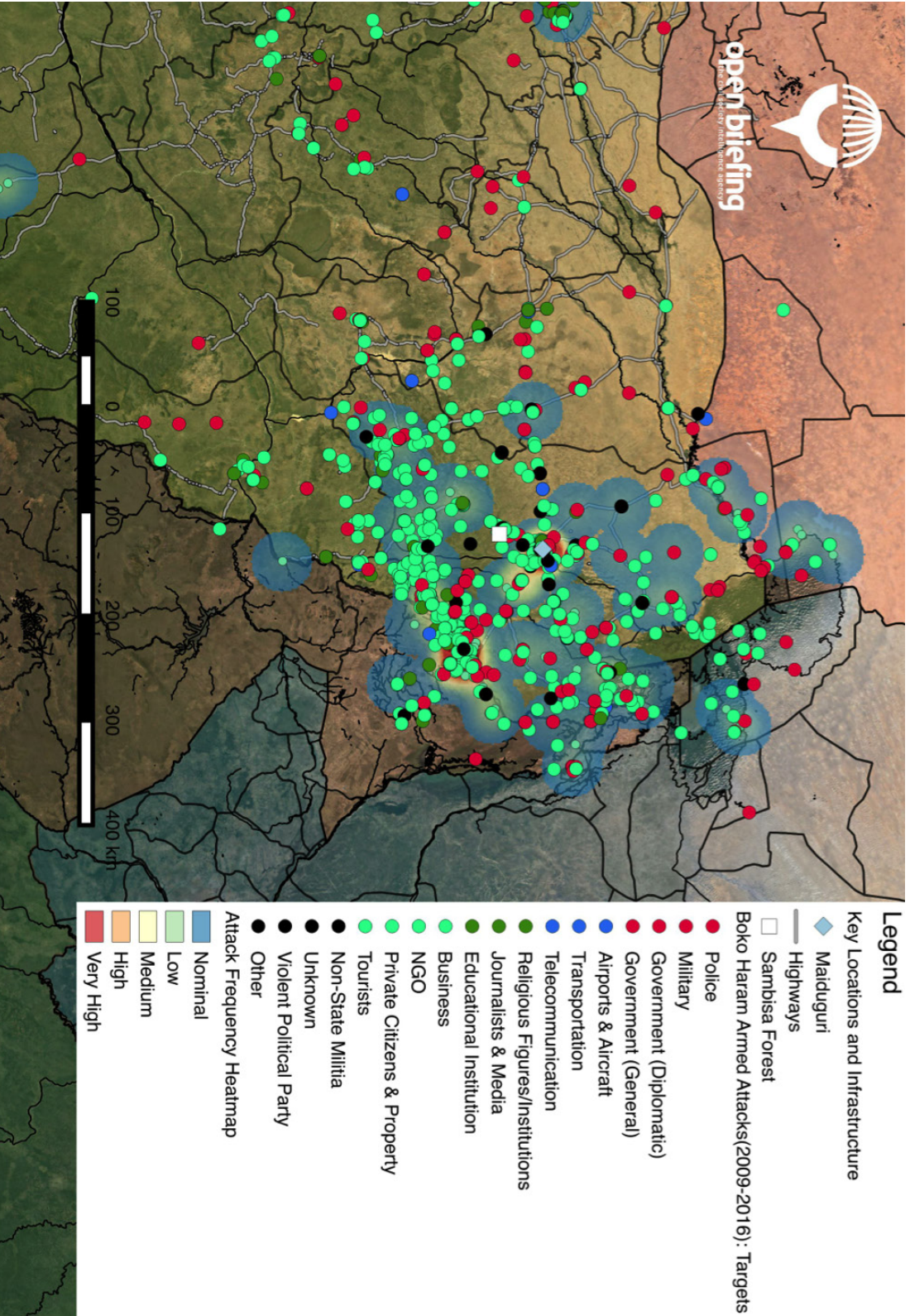


Figure 27. Boko Haram attacks (2009-16). Source: GTD, 2017.

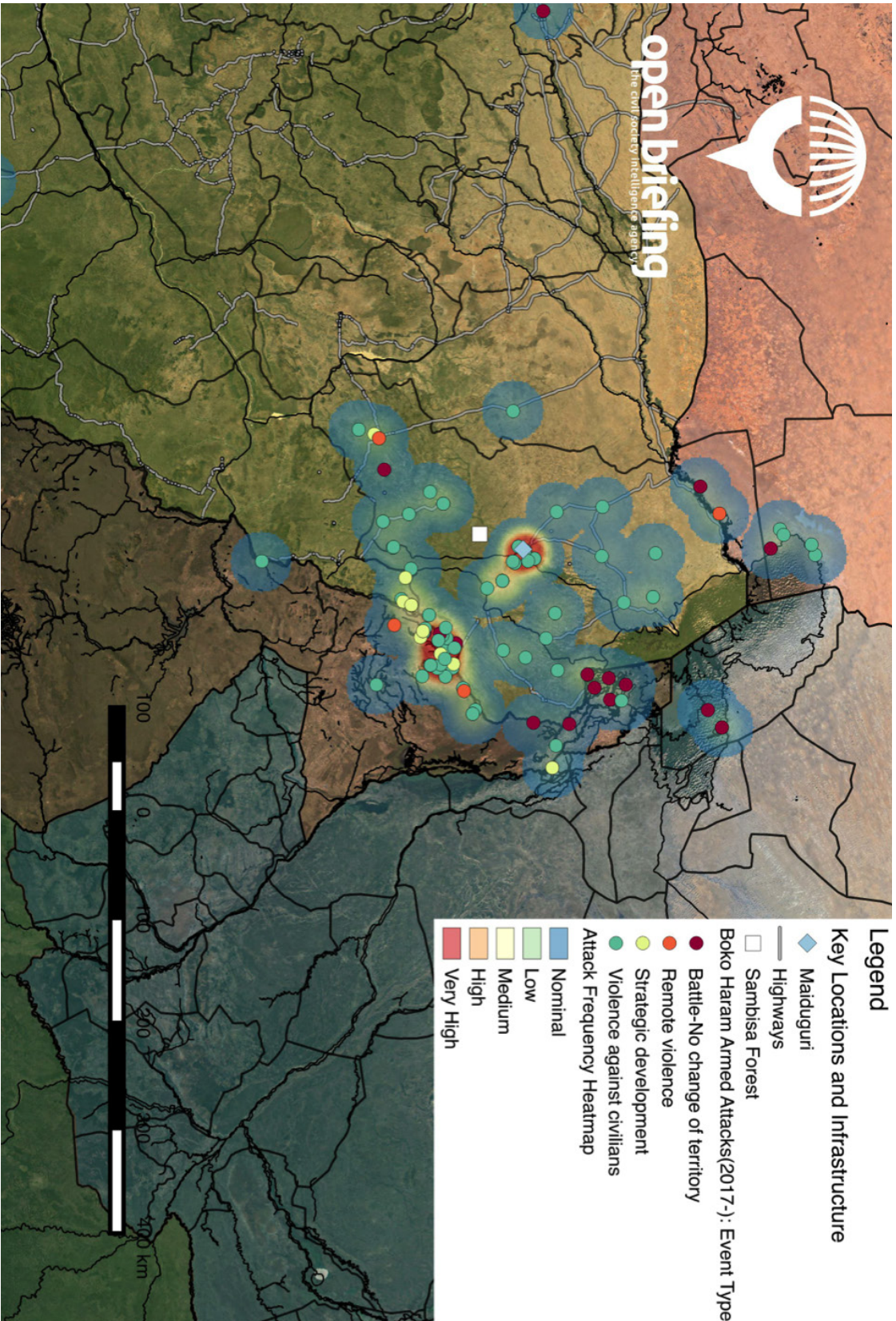


Figure 28. Boko Haram attacks (Jan-Sept 2017). Source: ACLED, 2017.

6. Discussion

Despite the secrecy surrounding international involvement in the fight against Boko Haram, it is clear that many foreign actors are playing a significant role in the conflict. The UK, US and others are attempting to bolster the capabilities of local and regional forces through training, military aid and equipment, intelligence and air support for these groups, who undertake the bulk of frontline fighting.

While remote warfare had some initial success in the conflict, it has not been enough to defeat the insurgency. Intelligence sharing, ISR and armed UAVs, private military contractors and SOF advise and assist missions have been opportunistically, not strategically, employed in the conflict. Moreover, the simple objective of the Nigerian government and their MNJTF partners to defeat Boko Haram is not necessarily the same objective as its foreign allies. Foreign forces have multiple and varied reasons for participating in or supporting operations against Boko Haram. These objectives strongly influence the nature of the assistance provided, regardless of the economic, security or social costs being borne by Nigeria and its neighbours.

The UK's provision of humanitarian aid and military training to Nigeria is spurred by its status as the former colonial power. This has created strong historical ties between the Commonwealth partners and ongoing support programmes from London. However, its continued involvement in combatting the insurgency is as likely driven by the desire to forge new trade partnerships as it is by security concerns.⁹² From a security perspective, piracy in the Gulf of Guinea is more likely to preoccupy London than the insurgency in north-eastern Nigeria.

Russia's limited involvement in combatting Boko Haram is likely driven by the bi-lateral trade relationship it has built with Nigeria based on arms sales. Discussions between Moscow and Abuja during 2017 highlight the opportunities that the Russian defence industry sees to supply modern military hardware, such as Sukhoi SU-30 fighter jets, to a regional power in Africa. Training and advisory assistance to Nigeria is provided

in this context. Russia's interest is not so much in helping defeat Boko Haram as it is in expanding its defence industry and encouraging Nigeria and its security partners to procure Russian military hardware.

For France and the US, the motive for helping combat Boko Haram is a combination of protecting national interests in the Lake Chad Basin and building the capacity of regional security and trade partners.⁹³ Both countries appear to take a greater interest in the broader security and political environment across West Africa and the Sahel than the insurgency in north-eastern Nigeria. Furthermore, the US objective may be to contain Boko Haram rather than dismantle the group and defeat the insurgency, as the latter goal would require considerable political and economic costs and risk mission creep. Meanwhile, China is likely pre-occupied with protecting its energy infrastructure projects and expatriate workers in Nigeria rather than defeating Boko Haram per se.

This diversity of objectives and the incremental and reactive application of remote warfare may be having unintended consequences. Boko Haram has adapted both organisationally and tactically to the push and pull of counter-insurgency campaigns. This first encouraged the militants to consolidate and centralise in Sambisa Forest and then to disperse and decentralise across Borno State, to the Nigeria-Cameroon border and around Lake Chad.

The 2013 troop surge during the state of emergency in Nigeria forced the insurgency to consolidate geographically. This unintentionally created the critical mass of Boko Haram fighters required to launch larger-scale swarm attacks against military and law enforcement targets. The subsequent air and ground campaign against Boko Haram in Sambisa Forest and the counter-terrorism operations supported by private military contractors appears to have had the inverse effect of dispersing and decentralising Boko Haram's presence across the Lake Chad region.

The sustained operations against Boko Haram during 2015-16, which included SOF training and ISR support from external

actors, resulted in the splintering of Boko Haram into multiple factions. Political and military leaders have welcomed the fragmenting of Boko Haram, but also decried it for stretching the limited resources of the local and regional forces arrayed against the group and, ultimately, for making defeating the insurgency much harder.

The polycentric operational structure that now characterises Boko Haram is driving the militant's use of more frequent suicide attacks on soft targets over the last 12 months. These attacks require less coordination, fighters and weapons. This tactical shift is necessitating a corresponding shift among local and regional forces from reclaiming territory to protecting soft targets. This is a relative move from a proactive strategy to a reactive stance. This may negate the advantages of remote warfare technologies and tactics, and render their further deployment less attractive to external actors.

It is likely that more-traditional physical security measures, and a clearer strategy, utilising HUMINT and investing in de-radicalisation programmes, could mitigate the rise in suicide attacks from a decentralised group more effectively than kinetic operations. In fact, prioritisation of a light footprint approach aimed at targeting individual members of Boko Haram without a broader strategy may impede conventional counter-terrorism operations against Boko Haram and undermine regional stabilisation. Furthermore, it seems likely that the incremental and reactive use of remote warfare tactics in Nigeria has played a role in driving the adaptive organisational restructuring and tactical repositioning of Boko Haram, and thus resulted in the continual deferment of decisive defeat. If this is the case, then there may be important lessons to learn that are applicable in both Nigeria and in other theatres where insurgencies consolidate then fragment and metastasise.

Appendix 1. Datasets

The spatial and statistical data analysis conducted in sections 2 and 3 were completed by building a dataset using the follow sources

Dataset	Source
Arms sales	SIPRI Military Expenditure Database (SIPRI, 2016) https://sipri.org/databases/milex
Boko Haram attacks (Jan 2009-Dec 2016)	Global Terrorism Database (GTD, 2016) https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/
Boko Haram attacks (Jan-Sept 2017)	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED, 2017) https://www.acleddata.com/data/
Attacks and counter-attacks on Boko Haram (historical and recent)	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED, 2017) https://www.acleddata.com/data/
Places of interest, places of worship, land use and built environment profile	Open Street Maps (OSM) downloaded from Geofabrik on 1 September 2017, http://download.geofabrik.de/africa.html
Land cover classification (Nigeria, Niger and Cameroon)	GlobCover Project, European Space Agency (2009) http://due.esrin.esa.int/page_globcover.php
Digital elevation models (Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad)	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs https://data.humdata.org/dataset/nigeria-elevation-model-cod https://data.humdata.org/dataset/cameroon-elevation-model https://data.humdata.org/dataset/niger-elevation-model
Infrastructure (major roads, waterways, rail network and river systems)	Open Street Maps (OSM) downloaded from Geofabrik on 1 September 2017, http://download.geofabrik.de/africa.html
Administrative boundaries	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs https://data.humdata.org/dataset/nga-administrative-boundaries
Population density statistics	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs https://data.humdata.org/dataset/nigeria-settlements-villages-towns-cities
IDP camp locations	International Organization for Migration https://data.humdata.org/dataset/nigeria-iom-dtm-datasets

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The Remote Warfare Programme
Oxford Research Group
Development House
56-64 Leonard Street
London EC2A 4LT
United Kingdom

+44 (0)207 549 0298
info@remotecontrolproject.org

<http://remotecontrolproject.org>